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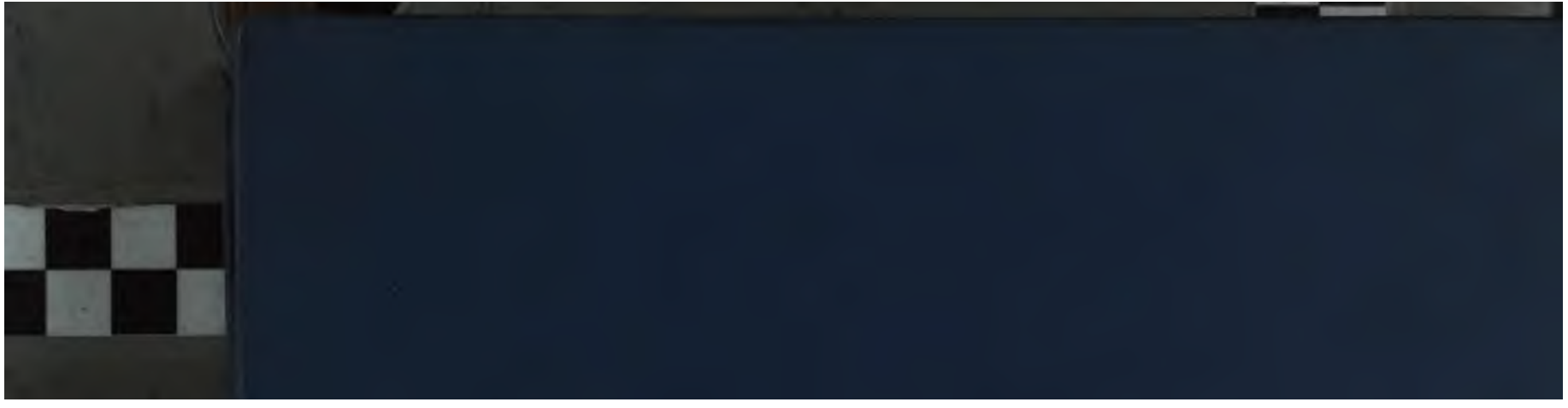
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MAY PERCY

THE CASTLE COMEDY

BY THOMPSON BUCHANAN





ILLUSTRATED BY ELIZABETH SHIPPEN GREEN AND DECORATED

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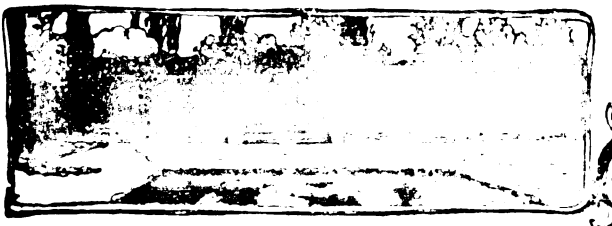
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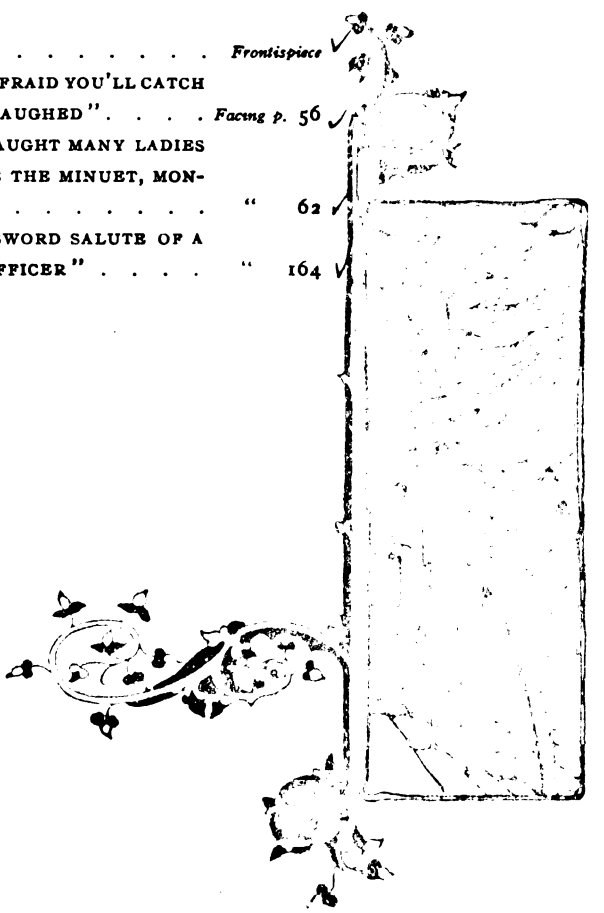
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MAY PERCY *Frontispiece*

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THE CASTLE COMEDY

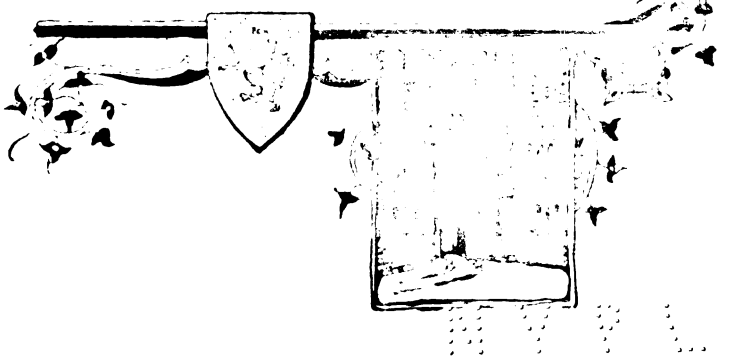
I

A WAYSIDE SURPRISE

"As the sands of the sea, beyond counting,
Deep as the ocean cave,
High as the stars above us,
Pure as moonlight on wave,
Strong as yon cliff beside us,
Broad as orbit of earth,
Hot as sun's rays at mid-day,
This love, sweetheart—yours from my birth."

CASUALLY the young man raised his eyes from his harp to find that he had an audience. He sprang to his feet, looking all embarrassment at the two girls standing so suddenly close at hand.

Pictures of twin beauty, contrasts,



they were, framed in the door-free stone archway of the half-ruined hut. And to him, looking outward, it seemed the cloudless sky above, the rolling park-land that stretched away, the nodding elms, the noisy brook quarrelling before the hut, and even the lazy road that wandered aimlessly across the view were all there and in place, but as a fitting background for that arch-framed loveliness in front.

And all this while the girls were laughing at him.

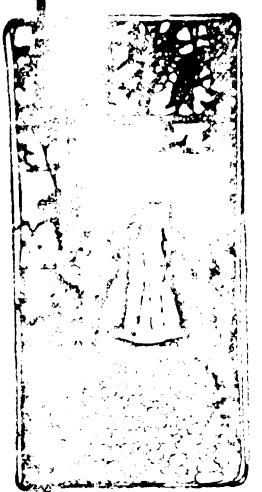
One was tall, perhaps, and slender, perhaps, with the hair of the Italian master—the hair that the red sun kisses, and then, unable to leave for the glory his kiss has awakened, hides in. Her mouth was made for kissing, for smiling, or for the sly saying of things that cut. And her hazel eyes would smile always unless a sad tale dewed them.

But the other — there could be no

"perhaps" here: he looked and gasped, for in those deep eyes he seemed to find, all intermingled, the witchery, the appeal, and the compelling power of midnight. Here was one who could jump the octave of emotions from laughter to rage, and strike not a mood between. Her hair was black, and, dimly, he was aware of her nose tilting daintily upward, a bit supercilious above the lips that met so straight and yet so tender, while under the white skin he could see the blood ran quick this way and that at the dominating black eyes' command. And they answered every thought.

Thus she stood, an imperious little Empress of Hearts, who needed no herald to announce her rank; for a new subject bowed down before her.

"Come, come, Sir Poet. There are two of us; which were you honoring?" She of the red-gold hair it was mocked him.



He bowed and answered her gayly, but his looks sought the other, the smaller girl, who held him.

"Ah, mademoiselle, a poor dancing-master can serve but the most beautiful."

"A dancing-master!" Her tone was different now. "Why, we thought to have found a love-sick poet swain when we heard you playing in our pet hut. Didn't we, May?"

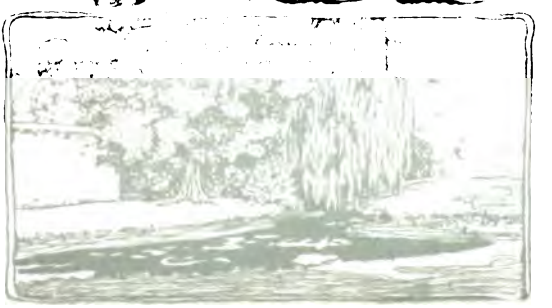
"Why, Eff, a dancing-master will be of far more use to us, awkward country maids. We'll learn to courtesy right, and, perhaps, the minuet if—" Her black eyes took him in with one swift glance.

"Master Dubarre," he stammered.

"Master Dubarre will teach us," she ended.

"The honor would overwhelm a poor Frenchman," This with another and a deeper bow.

"French?" cried the poet-seeker.



"Why, you speak English like an Englishman!"

"Ah, mademoiselle, I was reared in England, but"—the French shrug spoke volumes—"who would employ an English dancing-master?"

The laughter of the three, intermingled, swept away all stiffness.

"Come, May," laughed the Titian-haired one, "have you not a French cousin?"

"And by that token should be almost as good a frog-eater as this man, I suppose," cried May. "But you must not speak of him."

"Think, Eff, he is fighting Englishmen, when he is half English himself. His mother was my cousin Sarah, daughter of Cousin John Percy. It was by her running away with the young Vicomte de St. Croix, when he was secretary of the French legation, that the castle came to our, the younger,



branch of the family. It killed Cousin John."

"I sought the castle," interrupted Dubarre. "At the inn they told me one Sir Henry Percy had a most beautiful daughter, and she a friend who might show me how English girls can dance."

"I am Mistress May Percy, and this my friend, Mistress Ethel Courtleigh," spoke she of the black eyes, drawing up her figure in slender queenliness to its full sixty inches.

The Frenchman's third bow since his first surprise was the deepest of all. "That was a most unusual innkeeper, mademoiselle. He did not lie."

The girl flushed angry at the broad compliment.

"When can you begin your duties, Master Dubarre?" she said, stiffly.

"At once, if only I could move my comrade to the castle."

"Comrade?"

"Yes, mademoiselle." He turned, pointing over to one corner, and for the first time the girls saw another man, a big fellow, lying on a bed of moss, apparently asleep. "Poor Pierre! he play the harp for me while I teach the steps. This morning, coming down to a little ford, he stumbled. The heavy harp on his back hurled him down so much the harder. His head struck a stone. See!"

The dancing-master stepped across to the moss-bed, and Mistress Percy followed him.

"Oh, it is horrible! Will he live?" the girl exclaimed, when she saw the long gash running across the man's forehead at the roots of his hair.

Dubarre shrugged his shoulders again. "It is nothing. We French know much. I bound up the wound. Then we came on to this hut. Pierre was tired from the blood-letting, I from carrying the

harp. We stopped, and I sung him to sleep."

"But he must be carried to the house. He'll be too weak to walk. Here, Eff"— Mistress Percy turned impulsively to her friend — "ride you to the castle. Sir John Wilmerding and Captain Thorncliffe will be there awaiting us. Tell Sir John I say to bring a litter for this wounded man. I will wait here and tend him if he wakes. Men know nothing about such things."

The Frenchman regarded her for a few moments in silence. "You are very good, mademoiselle," he said, at last.

Ethel Courtleigh was on her horse riding along the road across the view to her destination a mile away. And as she rode she smiled to herself to think how Sir John Wilmerding, the handsomest, the proudest man in the county, would receive that command to bring out a litter and help carry in an un-

named, unknown, low-born assistant to a wandering, renegade French dancing-master. But Sir John Wilmerding would obey. Mistress Courtleigh knew that, for it was not recorded when any one—and Sir John last of all—had ever thought of disobeying the imperious little toast of the county.

None in that part of England was more powerful than the Percys. Sir Henry of "the castle" was the family head, and his daughter, Mistress May, had ruled too long a queen not to command absolute obedience. And so the smiling messenger delivered her command, and two men, inwardly cursing, hurried about to obey the latest whimsical wish of their sovereign.

Out in the hut Pierre was slowly reviving. The girl had Dubarre bring her water in his hat from the brook that rushed noisily before the door, and, using her own handkerchief, she washed



daintily and bound up the ugly wound with tender care. The big Frenchman lying there watched her face throughout with mute, dog-eyed affection.

"Does it hurt very much?" she asked, as he winced involuntarily.

"Non, non, mademoiselle. Mon Dieu! It is heaven!" he cried, while Dubarre, standing awkwardly with the wet hat in his hands, exclaimed: "Ma foi, mademoiselle! be careful, or Pierre will be falling down every day."

Then she ordered the wounded man to lie still, and made him close his eyes that she might get away from the silent, saint-hungry adoration in them. At her wish Dubarre seated himself at the harp to sing again the song the girls had interrupted. He sang this time, it seemed to May Percy, with more power, color, warmth, and fervor than before.

It was a very pretty song.



A WAYSIDE SURPRISE

And the girl who had been busy all the seventeen years of her life making others obey her slightest whims was now very happy with the first taste of doing something she thought useful for somebody.

When Dubarre had finished singing he had to answer questions about himself and Pierre.

Then, as she sat on the only bench the leaf-strewn hut afforded, watching the keen, strong-featured, alert face, the nervous, trained figure of the story-teller, his questioner learned how old Armand Dubarre, in the generation before, had taught the ladies of France to dance. How he had been indiscreet in carrying letters for a certain noble marquis. Dubarre shook his head when he spoke of this. "The elopement failed. The marquis was killed. The lady's family was very powerful, and my father fled to England." He went

on to tell how the outlawed Frenchman had started a dancing class. He taught the young ladies in noble English families, and so had married an English waiting-maid. Gaston Dubarre was their son.

The girl seemed to lose interest after she had found all this. She listened, though, when the Frenchman went on volubly to explain that he had followed his father's trade, and had taken up where the elder Dubarre left off.

"I used to play the harp," the son said, "and he taught. When he died, I went to France and stayed two years to learn the latest dances. Then I brought my cousin Pierre back with me. Now we are going to teach the English ladies how to dance. We hear of Mademoiselle Percy and Mistress Courtleigh. We hunt out your castle, and — ma foi! — we are here." He ended it with a French shrug.



A WAYSIDE SURPRISE

Mistress Percy yawned and went to the doorway of the hut. It was, after all, so extremely prosaic, so utterly unromantic. The man found singing love songs in the rustic wayside hut that she and Ethel Courtleigh had long used as their pet rendezvous was, after all, nothing but a mere servant, a hireling, with educated feet. And, acting on an impulse, she had dressed the wound of this low fellow's lower servant and had sent for a proud English gentleman to bring a litter to carry him. As she looked through the door she could see a coach approaching by the wandering road, with two gentlemen and a girl as outriders. Sir John had obeyed her command. The thought did not give her pleasure, though, for she was too used to having her commands obeyed.

Thoroughly disgusted now, Mistress Percy turned back into the hut. She turned just in time to intercept a look

that flashed from Dubarre to Pierre and back again. The girl caught her breath and walked straight up to the man standing beside the harp.

"Monsieur Dubarre, was that long-winded tale the truth?"

He faced her, laughing easily, and with the inevitable shrug.

"Mistress Percy can believe all or none, just as she pleases," he said.

Then the girl looked at Pierre.

The wounded man lay still, with eyes closed, face stern, and set lips that made no sign.

That evening Mistress Percy told Sir Henry, her father, Sir John Wilmerding, Captain Thorncliffe, and the rest of the company the story she had heard from Master Dubarre. And the next morning the dancing-master gave his first lesson.



II

DANCING AND DIPLOMACY

"COME, come, mademoiselle, that is all wrong."

The dancing-master spoke sharply, as one would to an unruly child, for Mistress Percy was in one of her obstinate moods, and the lesson had gone awry from the beginning. They were at one end of the long, narrow, bare fencing-hall, which since the arrival of Dubarre had become, too, a dancing-room.

Now the girl drew herself up to make the most of her inches.

"Monsieur Dubarre, I am not accustomed—" she began.

"To hear the truth," he ended for her,

smiling lightly. Then with grave politeness, "Certainly: if mademoiselle wishes to achieve awkwardness, I will say already she is far on the road to perfection. Pardon me for hitherto mistaking the aim of mademoiselle." His face showed deep concern at his mistake. Only about the eyes was the quizzical humor of a man amusing himself at the expense of a spoiled child.

Her eyes flashed danger signals, but, altogether unmindful, he turned to his assistant:

"Pierre, put your fingers out of tune, that the music may keep step with mademoiselle."

At the command, as an automaton might, Pierre, seated before his big harp at the other end of the hall, juggled the strings out of all time or tune.

"Do you not like it?" Dubarre asked, when the girl involuntarily put her hands to her ears. "If after three

months you will not keep time with the music, then the music must keep time with you. My reputation as a dancing-master demands that you keep together."

There was joy now in his tone as at the solution of a great difficulty.

"Possibly were the teacher better, progress had not been so slow," Mistress Percy blurted, angrily.

The Frenchman bowed profound acquiescence. "Mademoiselle is right," he said, now sadly. "I should never have attempted the task. My father, a famous dancer, often told me that only an old man could muster patience to teach the very young, who have no idea how to learn."

The girl whirled on him, splendidly angry.

"Am I to be insulted by my dancing-teacher? Monsieur, I would have you know this shall be the last lesson."

"Then it were wise to make the most

of it," he answered, coolly, and took her hand. "Pierre, play slowly. We will dance the minuet."

From pure wonder at his presumption, she yielded. For a time, back and forward, in graceful measure, they trod through the stately dance. Ethel Courtleigh, awaiting her turn, thought she had never seen so well-matched a couple. His figure, not tall nor broad, but well-knit and graceful, gave the impression of splendid strength. His face confirmed it. A disinterested spectator could not have seemed cooler or more unconcerned. Opposite, the slender form of the girl fairly vibrated with scarce-suppressed anger. Her cheeks glowed from its heat, while the big black eyes above were blazing.

The dancing-master stopped short and shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "One, two, three, four. Can you not possibly keep time?" he asked.

The watcher held her breath for the explosion she felt sure must follow, for no man had ever spoken to May Percy that way before. But the explosion came not. Instead Mistress Percy seemed stunned. The dancing-master turned somewhat impatiently to his assistant, "Now, Pierre, again."

Once more they trod the measure. A second time Dubarre stopped short.

"Is mademoiselle a clumsy milk-maid dodging cows' tails? Have you no knees?" he asked, with exaggerated politeness, then added, mournfully, "Oh, that courtesy!"

And then the storm broke forth in earnest. Mistress Percy jerked her hand from his.

"When came it," she cried, "that a paid teacher so addressed his pupil, and that pupil a lady? Am I a child to be ordered about by a runaway Frenchman, a trickster with his feet? No, I

will not dance. I am utterly weary of it, and I will never, never dance again." And with her head very high, and her body held very stiffly erect, the girl turned her back on him and walked proudly to the side window to see how utterly miserable everything looked without.

The man merely shrugged his shoulders and glanced at the clock.

"Certainly mademoiselle has taken more than her fair share of the time, but, then, Mistress Courtleigh learns so quickly that it will make little difference."

His tone was easy and absolutely cool. With a sigh as though to himself, he added, "Mon Dieu! It is exhausting to teach a young lady with a quick temper, who will not try to learn."

Mistress Percy whirled about to speak, then as quickly turned back to the window. Looking closely at Dubarre,



Ethel Courtleigh thought she saw about his mouth the faint shadow of a smile that was quickly pressed away. Then he came over to her.

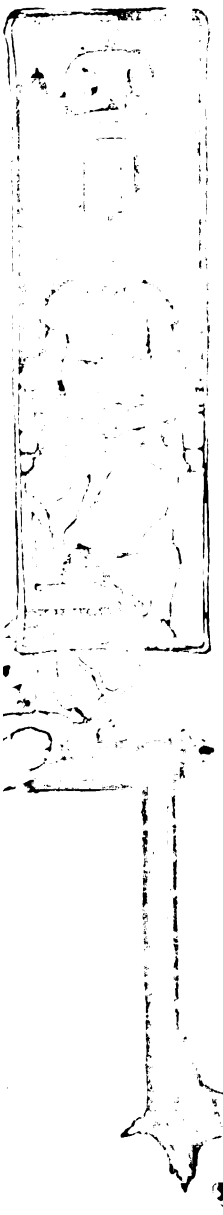
"Will Mistress Courtleigh so honor a poor dancing-master by affording him a little real pleasure?"

The tone was supplication; the bow, a courtier's. Ethel Courtleigh arose promptly.

"Pierre, we will dance that minuet."

Again the girl at the window started. She would not look, but she could hear everything. Now Dubarre was speaking. Above the music of the harp the words came to her.

"One, two, three, four—a gracious courtesy! A little more now. That is it. Ah, Mistress Courtleigh, it is, indeed, a pleasure to dance with one so graceful, so eager to dance well. Play that again, Pierre, I would see if Mistress Courtleigh can reach perfection twice." A pause



of a few moments, and he cried, with enthusiasm, "Indeed, indeed, you could not, for the last was e'en better than the first."

"With such a teacher, Monsieur Dubarre, it were, indeed, hard not to dance well." And Ethel Courtleigh smiled her gratification, while May Percy drummed violently on the window-pane.

Once more the music started and again, after some time, Dubarre began to speak.

"You know, Mistress Ethel, the spirit has so much to do with dancing. Pride and self-opinion are fatal bars. A gracious mind, a kindly spirit, a good temper joined with much determination —a lady so endowed must of necessity dance well, if she be not hopelessly awkward. Shall I teach you the French courtesy? Watch—this is it."

For quite a quarter of an hour the

tapping of the high-heeled slippers and the soft glide of dancing-pumps alone punctuated the silence. At the window, Mistress Percy had counted every limb on the trees within vision. Then Dubarre's enthusiasm broke out.

"Bravo! Bravo!" he cried. "Ma foi, I would not have believed it. I've seen ladies of the French court practise for weeks, while you have, as it were, caught the whole idea in a moment. Within a week, the most graceful woman at court could not surpass you."

The girl at the window at last turned to see Monsieur Dubarre leading his pleased pupil to her seat. He bent low over the little hand.

"May I thank you for a very great pleasure?" he said, earnestly. "It was worth the trip from France."

And Mistress Percy turned back to the dismal counting of the trees. Pierre stopped playing and began to put the

cover on his harp. Gaston Dubarre was preparing to go. Suddenly the girl at the window moved away from it. She hesitated for a moment, then with her old - time impulsiveness walked straight down the room to where the man who had chided and laughed at her stood.

"Monsieur"—she stopped, strangely embarrassed — "if—if — you please, I will dance that minuet."

She stood before him, her cheeks pink, her eyes wonderfully soft and moist, with the sweet humiliation of her first defeat. Not even his eyelashes flickered, but the man bowed very low.

"Her dancing-master is always at mademoiselle's service," he said. "Pierre, the minuet."

Fifteen minutes later Captain Thorncliffe and Sir John Wilmerding came in for their daily bout with the foils, just in time to hear Mistress Percy ask:

"And you do think I will improve?"

Dubarre smiled. "Already mademoiselle shows marked improvement," he answered.

"Thank you, monsieur," and the newcomers wondered at her tone.

Pierre put the cover on his harp and went away, the girls left, and Sir John, big, strong, and hot-headed, assumed his mask and foil against Captain Thorncliffe, the bluff and hearty soldier who had won promotion and gazette mention oft and over for his ability in fighting.

Yawning, the dancing-master went to the window.

"You are strong, Dubarre, I know. Why don't you fence, or shoot, or ride?" asked Captain Thorncliffe, as he was getting ready.

The one addressed laughed. "Those accomplishments are scarce within the province of a dancing-master, monsieur; but I have tried all three."



"When?"

"One day when you were away I crossed foils as humble substitute with Sir John. Mon Dieu! He covered my body with little round blue spots that gave pain for days. Then I essayed to shoot. Sir Henry Percy's big Jersey bull suffered. Lastly, I tried riding."

"Well?" questioned Captain Thorncliffe, laughing.

Dubarre shook his head sadly. "The ladies had to do without dancing lessons for a week."

"Come, are you ready, Hal?" asked Sir John, impatiently, and they crossed swords, while Dubarre turned back to his window. Soon the noise forced him to look around.

Assuredly the bout was becoming hotter every minute. The narrow place of arms resounded to the trampling of feet, while over all the two blades sang their rasping, clashing song of the steel. Up



and down the room the contest waged, now Captain Harry Thorncliffe and now Sir John Wilmerding holding the advantage. They fenced with the eager animosity of tried friends opposed in mimic combat.

"Touched!" Captain Thorncliffe cried it, and, stepping back, raised his foil, smiling.

"No, Hal, I protest; you touched me not. Your point failed to reach by quite an inch. I twisted away as I saw it coming."

Sir John was almost angry in his disclaimer. Captain Thorncliffe still showed his good-humored smile.

"Come, come, Jack, be generous. You have beaten so many that you can easily afford me one little point. Besides, I know I touched you. I felt it plainly. 'Twas the old French Percy trick that involuted me from Spain. We'll let Monsieur Dubarre decide as referee."

Sir John sneered. "What can a dancing-master know of fencing? Let him stick to his jigs, where he is at home. Zounds! You choose a queer umpire between gentlemen, Hal."

Dubarre, who had been watching the fight with indifferent attention, reddened ever so slightly. He walked over and with the utmost respect offered Sir John his handkerchief.

"Would monsieur have me wipe off the chalk from his plastron?" he said, and deftly pointed out a faint white dot on the red heart of the plastron.

It was Sir John's time to redden, Captain Thorncliffe's chance to roar.

"Pardon, gentlemen," said the dancing-master, "I cannot umpire longer, for Mistress Percy desired me to bring her Sir John Suckling's verses from the library."

As the door closed after Dubarre, Captain Thorncliffe pulled off the mask



to laugh. "Zounds! my beating you was nothing to what he did, Jack."

"The impudent dog!" exclaimed Sir John. "How could he have seen that chalk-mark?"



III

MARRIAGE VERSUS POETRY

"EVERY girl should desire to marry."

Sir Henry Percy puffed out his stomach and pursed up his lips to emphasize this distinctly orthodox sentiment. He was a large, heavy man, who thought that God made the Percys and then the world to fit them.

"But I don't intend to marry."

Mistress Percy stamped her little foot, and that made Sir Henry's emphasis seem tame.

"My child!" His tone and face showed such ridiculously pitiful wonder that in a moment she had changed from rage to laughter.



"At least, dad," with an upward flash of her eyes—"at least, not yet."

"Ah!" Sir Henry breathed once more, while Sir John Wilmerding, standing near, became again his normal red.

They were in the library, where, through the semi-darkness, the books seemed drawn up upon the wall line upon line, in unbroken, serried ranks at strict attention, while the chairs, each in its appointed place about the room, stood at picket duty, stiffly watchful. And all—the books, the chairs, the table—plainly resented such unwarranted, such unusual intrusion.

For this was the serious time when the years-fostered plans of two old men and the day-dreams of one young one were to be put to the test of a girl's caprice. From earliest childhood she had known that in the far-ahead, hazy, indefinite sometime there would come a

fateful five minutes when she must decide. In those days when old Sir Elmer Wilmerding and Sir Henry Percy often sat together talking of their lifetime friendship and the shared joys of the long ago, the two children playing in the hall knew that sooner or later in the talk one of the fathers would look at them. Then invariably both men rose, and, standing, the old cronies would drink a health to the children whose future union was to cement the life-long comradeship of their fathers. That either of the children might object never entered the heads of the two squires. They were friends; their children were to marry; that was all there was to it.

More than once the little girl with the big, imaginative, introspective eyes had cried herself to sleep at the prospect. Perhaps, in the sometime, she might love John Wilmerding, but she did not want to have to love him. She decided the

best way to manage was to dominate him, and she did.

It made little difference to John Wilmerding whether he had by rule to love May Percy or not—he just could not help doing it. She domineered him, plagued him, laughed at him, but still he loved her. It was very much after the unhealthy fashion that some men adore saints. Fearing her much and not realizing that she ate and slept and made mistakes as other mortals, he had never advanced his chances from boyhood on.

When the dictatorial child once had her slave properly cowed so that he feared to importune or weary her, she cast him completely out of her mind. Sir Elmer died, and the new Sir John in a year of town life hurt his fortune at cards and fought one duel over a court lady. Then he came back to the country to find his father-chosen sweetheart a marvellous beauty. Her will had

grown with her years, and it was good at the beginning. Straightway Sir John fell back into his old allegiance, and still she dominated him as in the days of their childhood.

Now was come that time when, under the agreement of the long ago, the children were to be brought together. Sir John Wilmerding knew the old agreement by heart—how three days before her seventeenth birthday they must be betrothed. The marriage might be delayed two years, but no longer.

It was a merely formal matter of a few minutes, Sir Henry Percy thought, as he called the young man and girl to the library that morning. The baronet was in a hurry to get away for his ride, but decided regretfully that he ought to spare a few minutes for telling his daughter she might begin preparing for her marriage.

His very first sentence had raised the

storm. Mistress Percy now paced up and down the library in most ungrown-up-like excitement. To be brought face to face with marriage when for weeks she had been planning nothing more serious than a birthday party was enough to disconcert any about-to-be-seventeen-year-old miss.

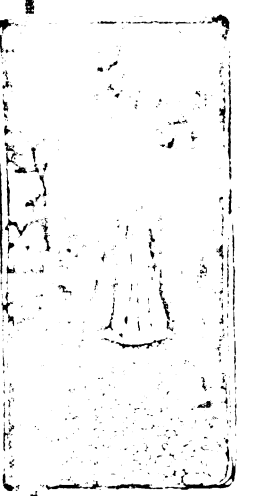
"Why did you not tell me of this, dad?" she demanded, stopping short and regarding the two men standing helpless before her.

"My child, the agreement—you knew it," he protested, weakly.

"Agreement! How could you and Sir Elmer agree whom I should marry?"

She was angry now clear through, and had won too many battles with her usually blustering father to doubt the outcome. He always blustered, then meekly gave in.

"But, May," Sir Henry answered, more firmly now as the Percy stubborn-



ness aroused itself, "Sir Elmer desired it, I desired and do desire it. Remember your duty to your father, child. John Wilmerding, now—"

"Yes," she sneered, "John Wilmerding has always been a most dutiful son."

The sneer was far beyond the good Sir Henry.

"I am very glad to hear you say so, my daughter. John Wilmerding is, indeed, a dutiful son, just as I am sure my May is going to be a dutiful daughter. Why, damme, girl, I'd risk my last acre on your doing what your old dad thinks best."

"But you can't want me to marry a man I don't love, father?" The word "father" in place of the old, familiar, loving "dad" should have warned him, but it did not.

"Love! Pouf! Fiddlesticks!" The squire fairly snorted. "What's love got



to do with housewifery, the ordering of servants, and the raising of a family? You do these things, and I'll warrant me John Wilmerding will do the loving for the pair of you."

Then the old man discovered there were two Percys in that room. The girl drew herself up, cold and white; only her eyes were blazing.

"John Wilmerding may gamble or fight his way into another's love, father, but I don't intend to marry him." Her tone was calm, even, rigorously indifferent. It might have been, "I don't care for a glass of water, thank you."

Sir John Wilmerding went white to the lips; Sir Henry Percy red to his ear tips.

"You d - d - don't," he stammered. "W - why—d - d - damme, you baggage, you shall marry him. Do you think I am going to be put out by a chit of a sixteen-year-old girl, my own

child at that? Not marry Wilmerding? Why not? Now you shall marry him, if he were the worst rake in the county, if he had fought a dozen duels over a dozen women instead of one. Do you want a milksop for a husband? If you do, I want no whey-faced preaching parson for a son-in-law. I tell you, he's only a lad of spirit." And, turning, Sir Henry patted the white-faced young man on the shoulder affectionately. "Did you ever see a finer boy?" he said, and whirled back to face his daughter.

Then his jaw dropped very suddenly. May Percy had gone over to the table, seated herself, and was busily turning the leaves of a book as though searching for something.

"What are you doing now?" asked Sir Henry, in very different tones.

"I was trying," she said, courteously, "to find that piece Mr. Butler wrote, in which he says:

"'Atone for sins they are inclined to
By damning those they have no mind to.'

I thought probably you and Sir John might like to read it. It damns the whey-faced hypocrites in great style."

Sir Henry's face became mottled purple now.

"You impudent hussy!" he cried, and started towards her, but she met him half-way with a glass of water snatched hastily from the table.

"Dad, dear dad"—her tone was all anxiety now — "do be careful; you'll have a spell. Nothing could be worth that, dad. Here, drink this," and she forced the water on him. Sir Henry pushed it aside and sat down heavily in a chair.

"May, little girl, you'll break your old dad's heart."

Defied and beaten at every point by the child, whose will was the stronger, the old squire could only sit and shake

his head mournfully. It was new tactics for him. Like a little girl, May Percy climbed on his knee, put her arms about his neck and her cheek against his. "Not for anything, dad," she whispered.

John Wilmerding looked on and wished himself a thousand miles away. The father began to talk once more, piteously, beseechingly, mournfully.

"It's my honor, little sweetheart, you see. The Percy honor—think of that. I pledged Sir Elmer my word that you should marry John. The happy union of you two children was to be the fruit of our life-long friendship. We pledged ourselves to it and even drew up an agreement. When you were girl and boy you were sweethearts, and then you both promised us that you would marry. Don't you remember that, May?"

"Yes, dad, yes," she said.

He waited, silent, for some time. Then he began, hesitatingly:

"If—if there is any other, girlie—if, if you are in love with another, and he is a gentleman of good stock and fortune, I will not come between you. I would even give up my cherished plans of a lifetime to see you married happily to a brave gentleman. Are you now in love with any one else?"

She sat up suddenly on his knee and looked at him with her eyes very wide.

"Why, no, father; whom could I love? Captain Thorncliffe will marry Ethel, Sir Harvey Johnston simpers, James Bate is a prig. There are no other gentlemen in the neighborhood."

Sir Henry gave a satisfied grunt. "Right you are, dearie, every time. You say, yourself, there are no other gentlemen here. Certainly I know of none eligible. Why, now, sweetheart, can't you marry John? Make him happy. Let me keep my word to my



dead friend. Preserve the Percy honor. That will save your old dad's heart, and you will be happy besides."

With a suspiciously husky gulp the old man turned to John Wilmerding.

"You young fool," he exclaimed, fiercely, "talk for your own happiness. I've done enough for you."

Then, sitting on her father's knee, with her arms about his neck, May Percy listened to the avowal of the childhood lover, whom she had repulsed a dozen times. He made it with all the stilted stiffness of a frightened, embarrassed Englishman. When he had finished, the girl buried her head on her father's shoulder.

"Yes, dad, I'll do it for you," she whispered. And the only betrothal kiss was Sir Henry's.

"The agreement gives me two years, and I intend to have every day of it,"



she said, and to that the men were bound to agree. When she started to go, Sir John tried to kiss her. But he fell back quickly, for she had snatched up Sir Henry's riding-crop and brandished it in his face.

"When you are my husband my lips will be yours—possibly," she said, and strode out with her head very high. Sir John could only curse under his breath, while Sir Henry roared at the Percy spirit.

"She's a girl worth having, my boy, and we'll announce it at the birthday party, that you may be sure of the prize."

In the great hall Mistress Percy met her friend Ethel Courtleigh, still flushed from dancing.

"Why were you not at the lesson, May? Monsieur Dubarre was teaching a new dance. He says we must both practise it this afternoon."

"I don't intend to practise. There's no use in it, and I'm tired," answered May Percy, crossly.

"Well, you had better tell him that," laughed Ethel Courtleigh. "I'll wager you don't. He's out under the big apple-tree now with a book of poetry."

"There is no reason why I should not tell him. I will do it at once," replied Mistress May, and she started for the apple-tree.

"My riding-whip 'gainst a pair of gloves you don't," cried Ethel Courtleigh after her.

His pupil found the dancing-master under the big tree.

"Ah, mademoiselle, here is one of Sir John Suckling's poems I wish to read you," he exclaimed, when he saw her.

It would have been rudeness to speak of the dancing lesson then, so she put



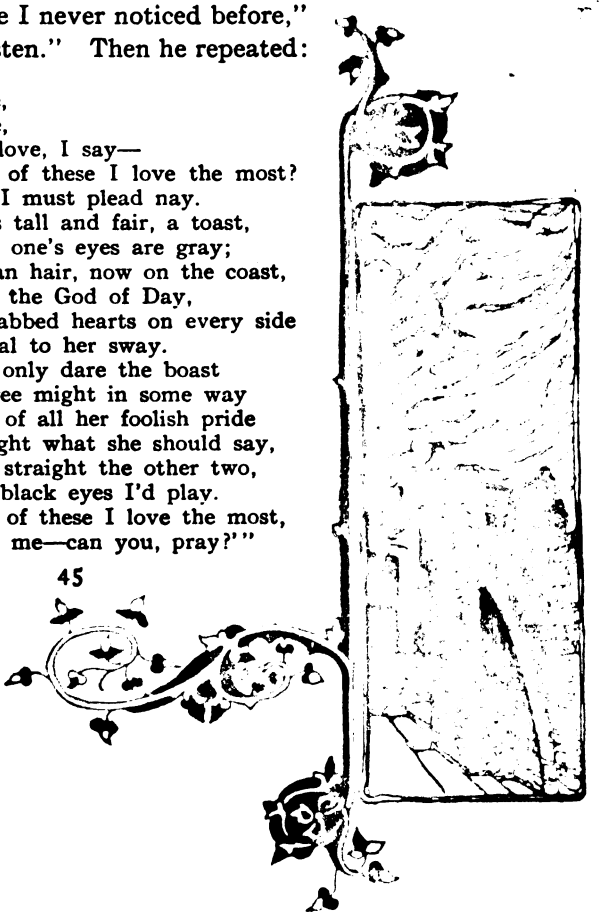
off the disagreeable topic. He read her that poem beginning:

> "Why so pale and wan, fond lover,
> Prithee, why so pale?"

and several others besides.

"Here is one I never noticed before," he said. "Listen." Then he repeated:

> "'One I love,
> Two I love,
> Three I love, I say—
> But which of these I love the most?
> To that I must plead nay.
> The first is tall and fair, a toast,
> And this one's eyes are gray;
> Two's Titian hair, now on the coast,
> Disputes the God of Day,
> And wit-stabbed hearts on every side
> Beat loyal to her sway.
> If I could only dare the boast
> That three might in some way
> Be robbed of all her foolish pride
> And taught what she should say,
> Forgetting straight the other two,
> For her black eyes I'd play.
> But which of these I love the most,
> Now tell me—can you, pray?'"



That night she looked over Sir John Suckling's poems—once, twice, a dozen times—but she could not find the one Monsieur Dubarre had read.

And then Mistress Percy pondered deeply.



IV

THE NOBLEST DAME OF ALL

FOR quite a minute all looked at Sir John Wilmerding in well-bred astonishment.

"A stupid game!" He jerked the bandage from his eyes and threw it on the ground. "I won't be a donkey for you all," he added, in disgust, which only gave the smiling Mistress Courtleigh opportunity to murmur, "If one could always choose!"

It was May Percy's birthday party, and the game of blind-man's-buff had come to a sudden end. They were playing out on the big lawn beside the castle. That lawn, a green, clear spot tucked away in a mile of thick-studded

forest trees, was just large enough for the ancient turreted structure in one corner, with the five acres of roses to the right of it, and the small, green velvet playground beyond. Representatives of all the neighboring families were there: Alice Harmon, Elizabeth Hampton, and Dorothy Stanfield, with Sir John, Captain Thorncliffe, Sir Harvey Johnston, the rich baronet "who simpered," and James Bate, the exquisite down from town, who had a most excellent figure to display his clothes.

In the game Sir John caught Mistress Courtleigh, then misnamed her Percy, and quickly lost temper at the laugh upon his love so easily displayed.

"Sir John is such an arch flatterer," Mistress Courtleigh had observed, slyly, as she slipped from his arms, and that precipitated the storm.

Choking with anger he faced them, while for a moment wonder kept the rest

dumb. Sir Henry, who had come out, essayed it, but only Mistress Percy could quell the storm.

"Come, come," she said, easily, "if Sir John is tired, I don't blame him for stopping. I would not have any gentleman weary himself against his will for my pleasure. We'll find another for the bandage. Gentlemen, volunteers—step forward."

She paused for a reply. The men seemed yet too wonder-struck to move.

"Such modesty I have never seen." There was sarcasm in her tone now.

"Let us find one ourselves, then, May," suggested Ethel Courtleigh. The girls looked at each other for a moment, then both nodded.

"Monsieur Dubarre?"

"The very one." Ethel Courtleigh's was the seconding voice. The others were silent — that is, all but Captain Thorncliffe. Had Mistress Courtleigh

proposed the devil, the captain would have fought before another should serve. Now he spoke simply:

"Where is Dubarre?"

"Polishing his pumps in the house, most probably, captain." Sir Henry could not better conceal his anger at his daughter's ill-timed suggestion.

Mistress Percy reddened ever so slightly. "I'll go fetch him," she answered, quickly, and took two steps towards the house, then paused. "Eff, come with me." And the two girls went hand-in-hand along the narrow path that ran beside the edge of the lawn through the roses to the house, hunting for a willing blind-man.

The others looked at one another and at Sir John. It was too good an opportunity to let pass. Sir Harvey Johnston opened the play.

"Mistress Percy picked a strange one," he simpered.

James Bate, the exquisite, glanced at his own well-turned legs. "A good dancer should catch any girl."

"Perhaps he will beat Sir John," remarked Elizabeth Hampton, innocently.

Then Alice Harmon's enthusiasm overflowed. "Monsieur Dubarre is very handsome?"

"And bright," added Mistress Dorothy Stanfield, looking at Sir John.

"His low birth is a pity, though," said the first speaker, in tones that implied a doubt of it.

Dorothy Stanfield tossed her head. "Oh, that makes him so interesting. If I were a man I'd fear him for a rival." Rumor had it that Mistress Stanfield kept an anxious eye on the Wilmerding acres.

Sir John still showed his irritation, though he tried bravely to talk to Sir Henry as if undisturbed.

"All Frenchmen are sad flirts, are

they not?" inquired Elizabeth Hampton, apparently athirst for information.

Mistress Stanfield answered her. "For shame, Bess — why, he's only French enough to be fascinating. He talks English like an Englishman. Don't you think so, Sir John?"

Before the lover could reply Sir Henry Percy's spleen put his discretion clean to flight.

"Sir John could scarce be jealous of the antics of a renegade French jig-stepper," he exclaimed, fiercely.

And when they all looked up, the jig-stepper, with the girls beside him, was at hand. The faces of two told that they had heard. The Frenchman's well-trained countenance seldom spoke but on orders from within. Now it was blank.

As though accustomed, Dubarre assumed easily the dominating place.

"Schottische?" he questioned. And



they entered straightway into the spirit of it.

"No, no!" they cried.

"Valse, then?"

"Never. Never."

"Polka?" with a shrug.

"Not to-day."

"Or minuet?" he asked. Then, most persuasively, "The stately minuet?"

They laughed at him.

He threw up his hands in despair. "What, then, can the poor dancing-master do? What is it that you want?" The question was to all; the look for May Percy alone.

"Blind-man's-buff," she said.

"Well, to the victim, the bandage," and with his usual nonchalance he placed himself obediently in the hands of Captain Thorncliffe and Mistress Courtleigh, the arch-persecutors.

"Is it tight enough?" asked Mistress Courtleigh.



"Close as your image to my heart, fair lady," he answered, gallantly.

"So loose as that? Captain Thorncliffe, we must pull harder." The captain did his best.

James Bate's pro-British must out. "Frenchmen work well in the dark."

"They must, to ferret English plots," came the quick answer.

"A nation of runners," simpered Sir Harvey Johnston.

"Trained by chasing the world's armies."

Then they spun Dubarre off into darkness. Now he went groping about, this way and that, all the while complaining aloud of the high English courtesy that made them stand aside for the humble dancing-master.

Perhaps it was the chance of the game that brought Sir John Wilmerding beside May Percy.

"That was a pretty scene," he

whispered, sneering. She looked at him, surprised.

"Lugging in a French nobody," he explained, angry. "I had to stand by and see—"

"Look out, monsieur is coming this way!"

She cried it, to stop the foolish lover, only tactless jealousy would not let him cease.

"Who is he?" was the next demand, when the flurry was past. His tone was now low, eager, angry, but the girl paid little attention. Instead of replying, she cried to the blind-man:

"Be careful, monsieur, you'll take the bench—you'll be a judge!"

"And should I not, mademoiselle?" he answered, laughing. "Justice is blind. Beware, yourself; I'll catch you."

"He suddenly appears at your father's home," exclaimed Sir John, "and, like any other menial, begs a position." He



was too angry to be careful now. The girl pulled at his sleeve to make him cease.

"Be quiet; don't you see monsieur is coming?" she whispered. That was the last straw.

"A toe - kicker," cried Wilmerding, aloud, and May Percy started forward, away from him.

"Oh, I'm not afraid you'll catch me," she laughed in Dubarre's face, then, dodging weakly, almost fell into his arms. There he held her as men hold their dearest possessions.

"Who is she? Guess who she is!" the rest shouted.

Dubarre straightened. "My—I mean, Mademoiselle Percy," he said, and, releasing her, bowed with the deep reverence of a subject before his queen.

"Good! Good!" cried the others.

Sir John strode for comfort over beside Sir Henry.



"'OH, I'M NOT AFRAID YOU'LL CATCH ME,' SHE LAUGHED"



The blind-man came back to light. He stood in the midst of them all, smiling slightly and holding the bandage in one hand. May Percy was beside him. The others stood about, but these two seemed in some way to be off to themselves, apart from the rest. The girl looked at her captor with a sort of troubled archness. Something, it was, of the same look she had worn when he made her dance the minuet. At last she spoke, and the tone was troubled, uncertain, questioning.

"I tried, yet I could not escape you. I have gotten past all our gallants easily. I don't understand."

Then evidently the dancing - master forgot himself. He bent towards her, eager, earnest to explain.

"Mademoiselle but slipped a little. My good-fortune caught her. Mistress Percy is handicapped always, for no man can stay long away."

The glance that flashed about the circle showed amazement then.

Sir Henry Percy, already black as midnight, grew ponderous in his rage. "Come, come, children!" he bellowed, "it's almost time for the feast. Hurry away to prepare yourselves," and thus rudely he broke up the game.

Gayly they moved towards the castle, the girls gossiping together.

"Isn't he graceful?" exclaimed Alice Harmon. "Did you ever see such quickness, catching May?"

Ethel Courtleigh laughed. "Tut, child, didn't you see him peeping?"

"For my part," observed Elizabeth Hampton, "I believe she slipped on purpose."

Dubarre still stood where he had caught May Percy. He was looking at the bandage in his hand and smiling with a sort of puzzled, quizzical wonder — as it were, laughing at



himself. Sir Henry Percy broke the spell.

"Monsieur"—with marked emphasis on the title—"seems strangely at home at the game of blind-man's-buff."

Sir John followed the lead.

"Certainly he displays rare excellence. One might imagine he had played diligently at it from childhood, with the French army, perhaps."

Dubarre looked up. "No, no, messieurs," he laughed, "not there. The Emperor reverses the game. His enemies are blindfold."

Sir Henry Percy and Sir John walked away with much dignity, but without giving a reply. Dubarre resumed his musing.

Now a big oak, the captain of the encircling host of trees, stood out in the centre foreground of the lawn. There was a bench on the dark side of the tree, and the path through the garden to

the castle ran past it on the right, and on the left continued to the woodland lodge, where the dancing-master lived, a quarter of a mile away.

The birthday feast was to be set on the lawn near this "captain" tree, and there, leaning against the bench, Pierre had left his harp. Mistress Percy, starting towards the house after the others, stopped in the garden to get a flower for her hair, then returned to the lawn to superintend the placing of the tables for the birthday feast. Coming along the path, she stepped from behind the big tree almost to overrun Dubarre. Both started.

"You here?" she exclaimed.

The man drew back. "I am in mademoiselle's way?"

"No, oh no," she protested.

"Mademoiselle is disturbed. Unwell, perhaps." There was insistence in his speech.



"You know I'm not."

Still he seemed bent on forcing it. "What, then, mademoiselle?"

Quickly she faced him, all sternness. "'Tis you, sir."

For the first time since they had met the girl had the upper hand.

"I?" he cried, aghast.

"Yes, you've been remiss." The words were a rebuke; the tone, utter condemnation. They swept him to inglorious defeat.

"I remiss to you? Oh, mademoiselle!" He dropped on one knee, pain in every look and word and gesture.

"Yes, you've not given me my dancing lesson." And the smile that broke over her face as she said it showed the first awakening of one who begins to know.

Dubarre sprang to his feet all ablaze with happiness.

"Ah, mademoiselle, like le bon Dieu,

you give pain that great joy may follow."

"Monsieur!" That was all, but the smile, still there, spoke volumes.

"It was your birthday. I thought the lesson forgot." He cried it eagerly as a defence.

"Monsieur!" Reproachfully this time she said it.

"But how I shall atone!"

"The minuet."

"With Pierre and his harp," the man broke in, delightedly. He ran to the path and called over towards the lodge, "Pierre! Pierre!" then came back to the girl beside the tree.

"Have you taught many ladies of France the minuet, monsieur?" she asked, as they waited for Pierre.

"I fear that none can now be taught, mademoiselle."

She drew up coldly. "Which means, of course, they all know. We English



"'HAVE YOU TAUGHT MANY LADIES OF FRANCE THE MINUET, MONSIEUR?'"





girls are perhaps more backward. We learn more of housewifery, less of junketings and furbelows."

After that there was silence until Pierre appeared.

"A minuet, Pierre." The dancing-master spoke in his most professional tone. The music began and they took positions.

As their hands met in the dance: "And does the house— Oh, what do you call it?" asked Dubarre.

"Housewifery?" prompted the girl.

"Yes, that's it, does that give the grand air, mademoiselle?" he questioned, most innocently.

"Does flattery come within your province, Monsieur Dubarre?" she answered. "'Twas brave of you."

"Even a poor dancing-master can be brave for the truth, mademoiselle."

There was no reply for that.

"You said your countrywomen do

not care for the minuet. Why is it?" she asked, after a pause.

His face lighted. "Because their hearts pump warm blood, mademoiselle, not freezing water that boils only from anger. For such, the minuet, but for women of heart, the dance."

"The dance?" She stopped and looked the question. "One we English would like? What is the dance?"

The time, the scene, the maid had all combined to make the Frenchman reckless. The poetry of his French nature was uppermost.

"It is a world's music throbbing in one's feet — this dance! Ah, mademoiselle, to a man—" He paused.

"Yes, to a man—" she repeated, slowly.

"It is sometimes to carry heaven in his arms until his very heart sings in its joy."

"Carry heaven in his arms, monsieur?"

"I mean the valse, mademoiselle.

Would you valse?" His eagerness was overwhelming.

To her cheeks there came the quick flush that faded quick again; in her eyes that look of sweet yet arch surrender. "You are the dancing-master, monsieur."

"Pierre, a valse," he cried.

Then Dubarre stepped close and put his arm about her.

"With all respect, mademoiselle."

She yielded, and they began waltzing slowly.

Now Dubarre spoke. "One, two, three — one, two, three. Ah, mademoiselle, 'tis the poetry of life clothed in the joy of motion. Can you not feel, for thus 'gainst each other hearts' talk, throb to throb."

Over beside the tree Pierre began to show signs of uneasiness.

May Percy's head was bent down. Her breast moved with deep breaths, a

dawning pink had stolen to her cheeks. Dubarre looked at her.

"Pardon, mademoiselle, I was wrong. 'Tis far more beautiful when the warmth of an English heart melts the mask of ice from off the face." He half-whispered the words.

Pierre coughed sudden warning.

The man continued, eagerly, "Then, then, mademoiselle—"

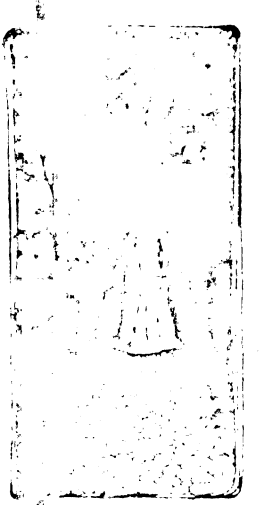
Again Pierre coughed aloud. Dubarre glanced that way. The harpist, with his head, was making violent signs of disapproval.

The hands of the dancing-master fell. He stepped back suddenly and bowed. When he spoke it was in quite altered tones, and very sad.

"But, mademoiselle, I forgot. There is another dance, quite another dance—the dance of the sword, where men choose honor for a partner and go down to meet death at the end. And that,

mademoiselle, is the grandest dance of all."

They stood apart, looking at each other. In his face she watched struggling resolution gain hard mastery, while he saw but blushing wonder and the questioning softness of her eyes. And as they stood thus there floated over from the harp the air of an old French love-song, a song of parting. But louder, from the direction of the house, came the hearty voice of Sir Henry Percy, calling, "May! Oh, May!"



V

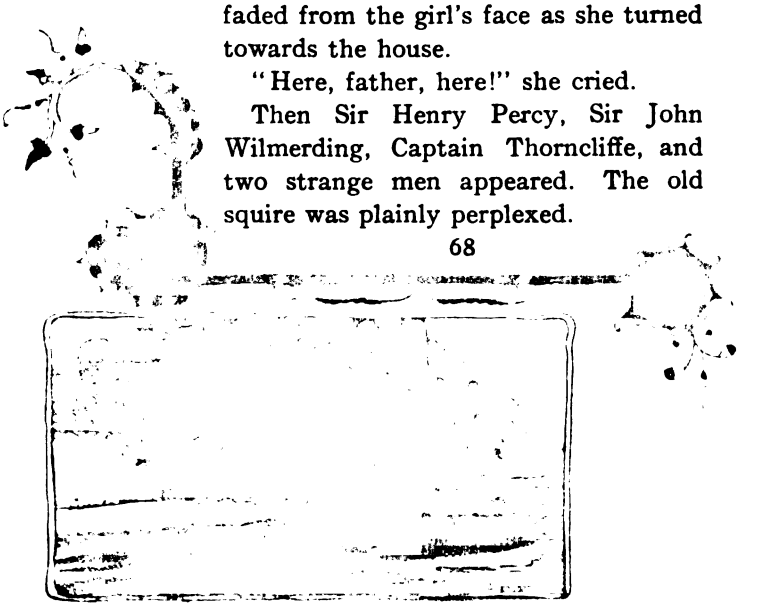
HER DANCING-MASTER'S TOAST

"MAY! Oh, May!"

Again the big voice of Sir Henry Percy bawled across the lawn. The noise of it shattered the air of the French love-song, and broke in rudely on the man and girl standing there silent, looking at each other. They dropped again from the cloud-world of fine romance to hard earth with a jar. The wonder, the blush, the softness, all faded from the girl's face as she turned towards the house.

"Here, father, here!" she cried.

Then Sir Henry Percy, Sir John Wilmerding, Captain Thorncliffe, and two strange men appeared. The old squire was plainly perplexed.



"What am I to do with these, May?" he questioned, helplessly, indicating the strangers. "Another pair of beggarly Frenchmen."

Dubarre heard and bowed. "Your kindness preserved one beggar Frenchman, monsieur. He will be always grateful."

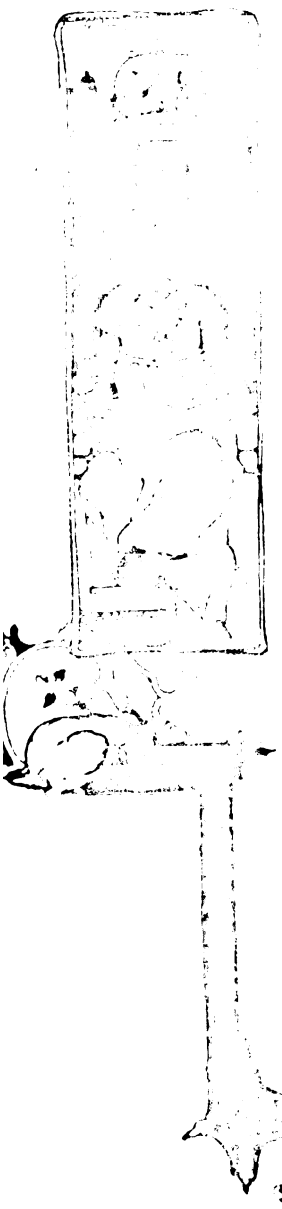
One of the new-comers, a man of about Dubarre's size and general appearance, seemed to think it was time for his appeal. With a wanderer's skill he went straight to headquarters.

"Will ze kind lady help zis poh Frenchman?"

"What can I do?" asked May Percy, gently.

The stranger became instantly voluble.

"My name, Jacques Fourney. My cousin, Jean." Then he indicated by signs that Jean was deaf and dumb. "We run from ze la belle France, from



ze leetle Corsican. He hate us. We look for comrades, les bons comrades, who came before. We meet, zen we be so happy, but"—as he noted the tables which the servants had begun to spread for the feast—"so hungry."

May Percy's mind was already made up. "Father, no person shall go hungry from here on my birthday," she cried. "These men must stay, eat, and rest to-night. To-morrow you will give them a little money to help them on their way to find their comrades."

Then Dubarre spoke.

"Mademoiselle, may not all the beggar Frenchmen be together? I will gladly share my room with my compatriots."

At the words Jacques Fourney looked quickly at the speaker. For a moment their eyes met. Then Fourney's glance fell.

"The very thing!" exclaimed Sir Henry Percy.



"Yes, a good plan — all together," echoed Sir John.

Mistress Percy turned to Dubarre. "Certainly, monsieur, if it gives you pleasure," she said. And so the matter was settled. As Dubarre led the newcomers off towards the house Captain Thorncliffe was coming to the lawn. At sight of the smaller Frenchman the soldier checked suddenly, looked in puzzled fashion, then came on, evidently wondering. The little Frenchman ducked his head and hurried after Dubarre.

The tables had been set, the feast brought on, and the guests came trooping back. May Percy, from her post at the head of the table, seated them.

"On my left, captain; Ethel, next to him; next to Ethel, James; and you, Alice, on my father's right." Then she motioned for Sir John to sit at her own

right hand. "Dorothy — Sir Henry — Elizabeth."

"I'm sorry the bishop is not here to ask the blessing," quoth Sir Henry. "You should have brought him, Sir Harvey."

"His Grace's gout prevented," answered Sir Harvey Johnston, "but he hopes to be over in a day or two."

Now all were in place and the feast began. Seated on the bench behind the big tree, a dozen feet away and almost out of sight, Pierre, at the harp, made music for the diners. Dubarre had gone to show the strangers his room. Such feasts were not for renegade dancing-teachers.

Gradually, at the table, appetites surrendered, and there came that time when tongues were loosed in praise of host and hostess. Captain Thorncliffe had been descanting on the virtues and might of the Percys.

"Why, even the French have a Percy," he exclaimed, as a climax.

"Indeed?" asked Sir John Wilmerding, with interest.

"And he is the worst devil in the army," added the enthusiastic captain.

"Sedition! Sedition!" went the laughing cry about the table, and Sir Henry came quickly with explanations for his family.

"He is my cousin." The squire spoke very much after the same fashion as would have admitted, "My brother died of leprosy."

But Thorncliffe was honest in his admiration.

"Indeed, you should be proud of the connection, sir," he said, while May Percy clapped her hands, crying:

"Good, captain, good!"

"Tell us! Is he handsome? Let us know all about him. What has he



done?" came the irregular fire of questions from the rest.

"Well," said the captain, meditatively, "for one thing, he stole General Wellington's papers."

"A thief!" It was the horrified chorus.

"Ay, and one of the boldest," laughed the soldier. "When we started from Lisbon we were warned of this French Percy, who might pass anywhere for English."

Interested in what promised to be a good story, none noticed Dubarre, who, coming along the path from his lodge, quietly took his seat on the bench beside Pierre and began to listen.

"A traitor is this Percy?" asked Sir John.

Sir Henry answered: "His mother was my cousin, Sarah Percy."

"Daughter of Cousin John," added May Percy.



Her father nodded. "He disinherited her when she ran away with the Vicomte de St. Croix. We never saw her again."

A gentle "Ah!" of sympathy for the disinherited daughter of the long-ago ran from girl to girl about the table.

"There was no heir; the place came to our branch," continued Sir Henry. "I believe her son is called Percy. I heard she died abroad, and rumor says the boy was taught by Englishmen."

"They did their work well," spoke up Captain Thorncliffe. "As I began to tell you, we were after Soult close. One night a man, claiming to be an escaped English prisoner, joined the ranks. He wore a heavy English beard and looked the Englishman. Also, he gave good information of Soult and led us until nightfall. At daybreak there was a cry of alarm, a stir at the outpost. In the camp three sentinels were dying.

A lieutenant who tried to stop the stranger fell wounded. In the morning the 'escaped English prisoner' was gone. So were the headquarters' papers." The captain finished with a smile and shrug. Not so his hearers.

"Atrocious! Audacious! Horrible! Could nothing be done?" They were the exclamations of scandalized, stay-at-home Englishmen, horrified at the insult put upon their country's arms abroad.

The captain listened, then continued, smiling: "Yes, in the morning came a message under flag of truce. 'Feeling that he had taken advantage of our hospitality,' Vicomte de St. Croix, the man who once held a Spanish pass for half a day against a regiment, offered to fight any officer in the English army with sabres for the amusement of the two hosts and the English headquarters' papers as the prize."



"Did any one accept?" asked May Percy, eagerly.

"The general would not allow an officer to commit suicide," was the laconic ending.

"Suicide?" questioned Wilmerding, surprised.

"Exactly," answered Thorncliffe. "No man in fair fight can stand against French Percy."

"Captain Thorncliffe seems very friendly towards the renegade," simpered Sir Harvey Johnston, disagreeably.

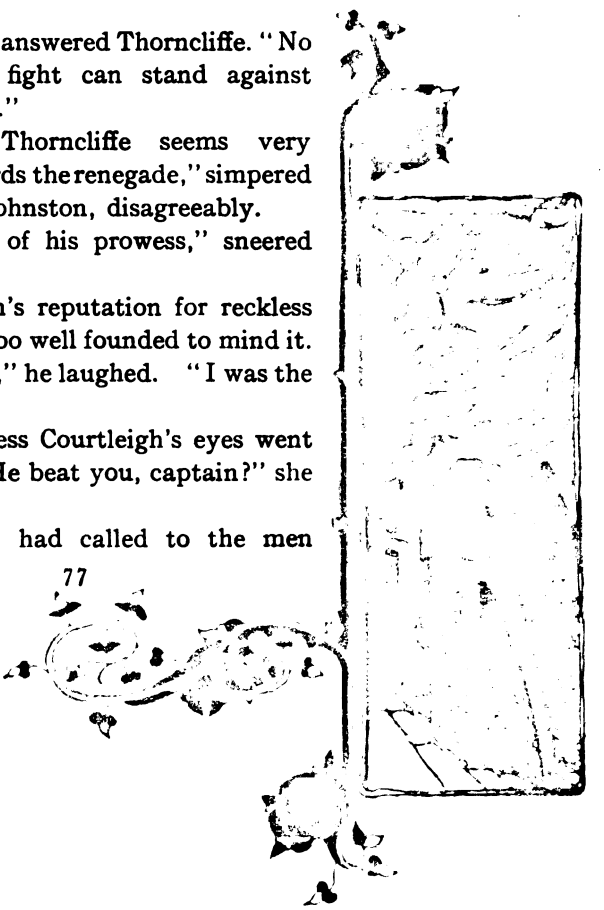
"And sure of his prowess," sneered James Bate.

The captain's reputation for reckless bravery was too well founded to mind it.

"Naturally," he laughed. "I was the lieutenant."

Then Mistress Courtleigh's eyes went very big. "He beat you, captain?" she exclaimed.

"Easily. I had called to the men



on outpost not to shoot, because I wanted to take the daring fellow alive, myself. 'Thanks, monsieur,' he cried, accept your life and a small wound from me.' Then he cut me down, jumped on my horse, and rode away amid a storm of bullets, calling back to us, 'Vive l'Empereur!' Naturally I feel in his debt."

"Audacious scoundrel," roared Sir Henry, then added, "But his grandad old Jack Percy over again."

"But is my cousin handsome?" questioned May Percy.

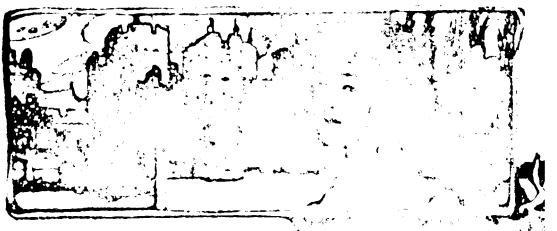
"They say so, without his beard."

"And married?" she persisted.

The captain laughed again. "No—and he despises women. They adore him."

"Well, for my part," sneered James Bate, "I don't admire renegades."

"Nor I like spies," simpered Sir Harvey Johnston.



Sir John Wilmerding had become a bit excited. "Nor I, either," he cried, "the low thief." Then he added, viciously, "I'd love to have him at my sword's point—this French Percy."

At that Gaston Dubarre and Pierre, seated on the bench behind the tree, looked at each other. "A shallow strutter, Pierre," said the dancing-master. And between two touches on the harp-strings his man nodded a smiling "yes."

Over at the table May Percy and Ethel Courtleigh were talking low. "I'd like to meet my cousin," said Mistress Percy.

Captain Thorncliffe, still chuckling to himself over Sir John Wilmerding's last speech, heard her.

"You may yet, young lady," he cried. "'Tis said to be French Percy's boast that some day he will come to England and stop at his mother's home. They

say he promised her to do it." Sir Henry Percy rose quickly then.

"Tush, tush!" he exclaimed, irritably. "Enough of this. We should be merry, not discuss French dogs, for to me this is an especial time for joy."

"To be sure, to be sure," cried Thorncliffe, eager to make amends, "for isn't it the seventeenth birthday of one of the fairest maids in all England?"

"Right, captain, but my joy goes deeper. This is not only my daughter's birthday, but to-day sees my fondest hopes well on the road to be realized."

Sir John Wilmerding glanced at May Percy, then smiled a quick smile of joyful anticipation. At her father's words the girl's eyes flashed fierce rebellion, then, as she looked at him standing there so happy, became as quick miserably resigned. With mastodonic playfulness, Sir Henry continued:

"It's a pretty secret, and it is my pleasure, friends and neighbors, to tell you of it, but can you guess this little romance?" He paused.

About the table were sly winks, and laughs and gestures towards Mistress Percy and Sir John. A dozen feet away, and partly screened behind a tree, a man stood at strained attention, watching a girl's face and listening for every word.

Again Sir Henry took up his speech. "It all goes back to the time when Sir Elmer Wilmerding and I were young men, friends, closer than brothers. And in those days we planned a romance. He had a son, young John Wilmerding, and I a daughter."

Now at the tree Pierre stopped playing and rose quickly to lay a sympathetic hand upon his comrade's shoulder. That comrade paid no attention—only, with his eyes he sought

that other pair of eyes, equally miserable, and watched, answering line for line every mark of pain on a girl's white face. And the gay tittering about the table was the laughing accompaniment for breaking hearts. The squire was now in a hurry to finish.

"We fixed our hopes on these children. I have watched John Wilmerding grow, and, whether a playing boy, a youth, or a man, he has held my respect, and to-day I am very happy."

There was deep silence among the guests, the silence of stilled expectation. Beside the tree Dubarre bent forward, eager, intent, fearful, a prisoner awaiting the certain death sentence.

"It is with great joy"—Sir Henry spoke now very slowly—"that I announce the betrothal of my daughter, Mistress May Percy, to Sir John Wilmerding."

He stopped, beaming over all. Now

rang out the "bravos" and the lively buzz of congratulation. Over by the big tree a man turned bitterly aside. "Mon Dieu! and they call that a romance!" he said. The prisoner had gotten his sentence.

At the table, her strained smile making mock of her own miserable eyes, a girl sat waiting for the hum of congratulation to simmer down. Sir Henry raised his glass.

"And now to the health of these young doves. Their health, friends, their health!" he cried. It was drunk standing, and when they sat down Captain Thorncliffe remained on his feet for a speech.

"I believe with the Scriptures," began the captain, "that he who captureth a woman's heart is greater than he that taketh a city."

"Did Lord Byron or Sir Walter Scott write your Bible, captain?" asked Mis-

tress Stanfield. But the soldier was impervious to assault.

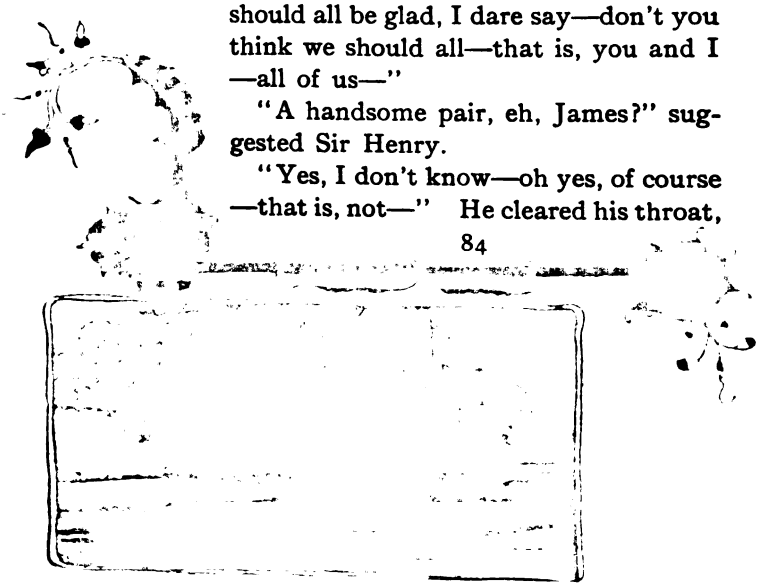
"And I will add," he continued, with a meaning glance at Ethel Courtleigh, "great is the woman who will allow her heart to be captured. And so—and so—I will drink a health to those who have so closely followed the Scriptures, and may they always show their wisdom and—and—er—magnanimity, as they have done on this occasion."

The captain gave place to James Bate amid cheers and laughter.

"Upon my word, I ought to say something," he began. "I know I ought—I ought, but I cannot think of it. We should all be glad, I dare say—don't you think we should all—that is, you and I—all of us—"

"A handsome pair, eh, James?" suggested Sir Henry.

"Yes, I don't know—oh yes, of course—that is, not—" He cleared his throat,



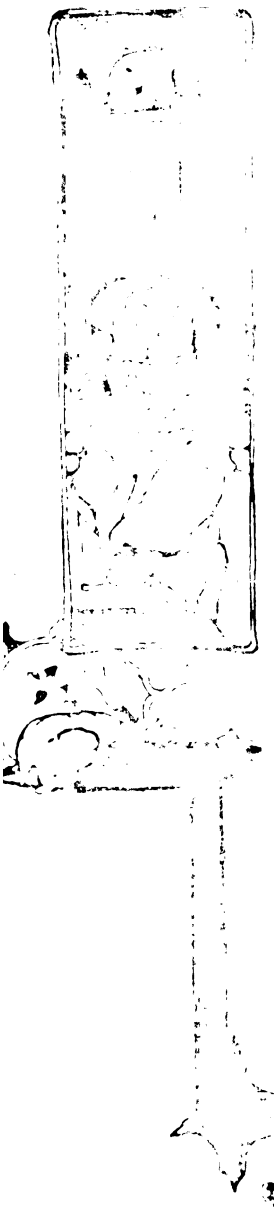
then paused for a moment, silent, awkward. "It's embarrassing as the dev—"

The captain coughed violently. James Bate stood, not knowing what to do. The others laughed.

Suddenly from behind the tree at the left appeared Dubarre. In five quick strides he had reached the far end of the table. His head was high, his body erect. It was not the dancing-master, but a suffering-made gentleman among his peers, who came magnanimously to add his congratulations to the rest. By comparison the exquisite opposite was more awkward, more silly than ever. The guests looked up astounded.

"Pardon, monsieur," and with the air of a French gentleman Dubarre reached over and took Sir John Wilmerding's wineglass. Then he stepped back so as to face May Percy and the rest.

"May a poor Frenchman, an intruder,



add his humble toast to mademoiselle?" he asked.

Sir Henry half rose, but the girl bowed without speaking, and he subsided.

Next, as silent, breathless at his audacity, they watched him, Dubarre raised his glass:

"To the Lady of Moods,

"To the Countess of Grace,

"To the Duchess of Gayety,

"To the Queen of Courtesy,

"To the Empress of Hearts,

"To the Goddess of Love,

"To her whose beauty now like a mountain torrent from above rushes o'er;

"Next, as the thoughtful pool at the heart of nature, woos one;

"Whose courtesy is the constant sweet picturing of her heart's innocence;

"The purity of whose soul, shining from midnight eyes, would shame the whitest moonlight;



"Whose Alpine courage and goodness tower above the clouds of men's understanding;

"Whose wit, as sun's rays flashing on those snow-clad heights, dazzles but does not wound;

"Whose moods are as the snow-flakes, infinite, yet each its very own;

"Whose love, as that snow, pure and undefiled, rests high, secure on the mountain of her trust;

"Whose whole self is God's expression of perfect joy to man.

"To her, then, whom, seeing, man must say, 'I have followed marsh-lights, but now the evening star; henceforth I follow no more marsh-lights.'"

He paused a moment, then added, with deepest, loving reverence:

"To Mistress Percy, God bless her!"

He drank, and, as in the Queen's toast, snapped off the stem of his glass. Then he stood looking down silently at

the pieces in his hand. And in his face could be read plainly what the broken glass meant to him.

With an under-muttered oath, Sir John started up from his seat. Mistress Percy laid a restraining hand on his arm, and he sat down again. At the foot of the table Sir Henry Percy sprang to his feet.

"Have done! have done!" the squire cried. "'Tis time for the dance. Come, all of you, and"—he added it with a sneer—"show your teaching."

Scrambling up in confusion, the party started for the house. But on the way Elizabeth Hampton found time to whisper to Dorothy Stanfield, "If he were a gentleman, Dorothy, Sir John would not be betrothed."

May Percy started with the rest, but in a moment returned to get her forgotten glove. She came back into the cloud-world of romance. Pierre was

playing softly on his harp, a dreary, mournful melody, the farewell. With his eyes bent down, Dubarre still stood beside the table. And as she watched him he raised his head, sighed, and the pieces of the broken wineglass fell at his feet.

"Monsieur Dubarre"—he started and whirled to her—"have you—have you"—she stammered painfully—"have you seen my glove? I dropped one somewhere."

In a flash Dubarre had spied it under her seat at the table.

"Ah, monsieur, you have it. Thank you."

He held the glove towards her silently. She started to take it, and he drew back his hand a little.

"Mademoiselle, can you? May I? Is there not some little ray, one token just for the helpless one, the hopeless one, the outcast?"



She looked at him, half frightened, all sorrowful. "Yes," she said, speaking slowly, and started away, looking back. "Yes," she repeated, and again, "Y-e-s."

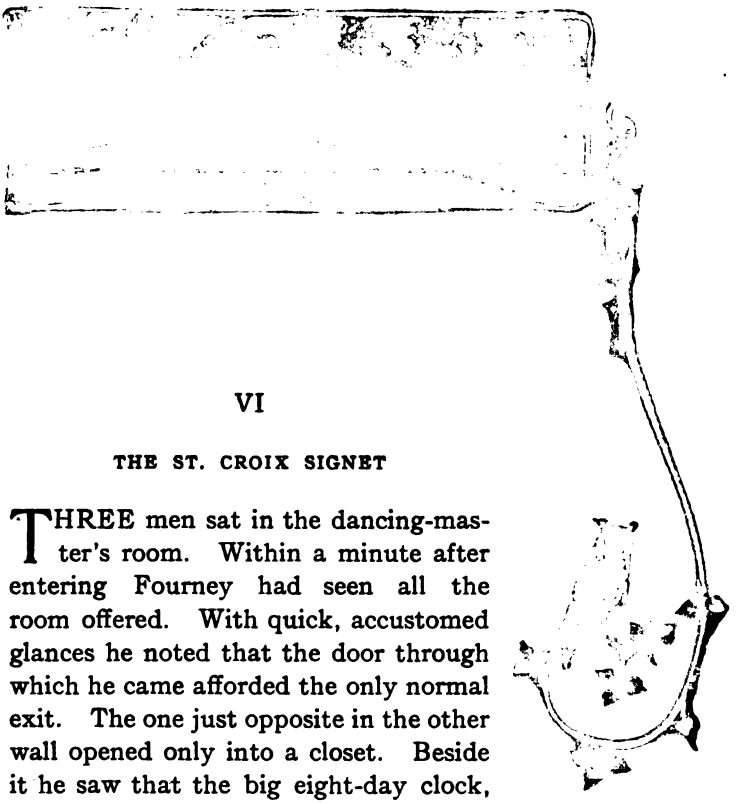
He watched her until she was gone from sight. Then he raised the glove to his lips and kissed it passionately, repeatedly.

The farewell was ended.

Pierre coughed and came from behind the tree. Dubarre hastily hid the glove in his breast, then turned that way.

"Pierre, we leave for France in the morning."





VI

THE ST. CROIX SIGNET

THREE men sat in the dancing-master's room. Within a minute after entering Fourney had seen all the room offered. With quick, accustomed glances he noted that the door through which he came afforded the only normal exit. The one just opposite in the other wall opened only into a closet. Beside it he saw that the big eight-day clock, which reached from the floor almost to the door-top, showed just the hour of six. On the right wall as he entered he swept over the only window, on one side of the handsome oak mantel, and the tester bed on the other. He could have told the wood of the table placed

near the clock, and the design of the three chairs, or how one brass andiron in the fireplace had been polished more than the other. It was a quick eye had this strange wanderer, chased from France by "ze leetle Corsican."

Now Fourney had been in the room two hours, and he was heartily tired of it. His cousin Jean snored in one corner of the fireplace. Pierre, brushing busily away at Dubarre's clothes, was no great company. Fourney had begun to grow sleepy. He leaned back in his chair, yawned, and looked at the clock.

"So slow ze time pass in ze countree?" It was more a question than anything else. Pierre, still busy with the brush, replied in kind.

"You are from ze city—from Paris?"

"Non, Normandie."

"Parlez-vous français?" asked Pierre, abruptly. The suddenness of such a



foolish question apparently confused Fourney.

"Non, non," he said—"that is, not parley well."

The other's lifted eyebrows and wondering shrug were marvels of their kind.

"A Frenchman not parley Français!" he said.

"Me half French," explained Fourney.

"Ma foi!" and the way of saying it made the half-Frenchman squirm.

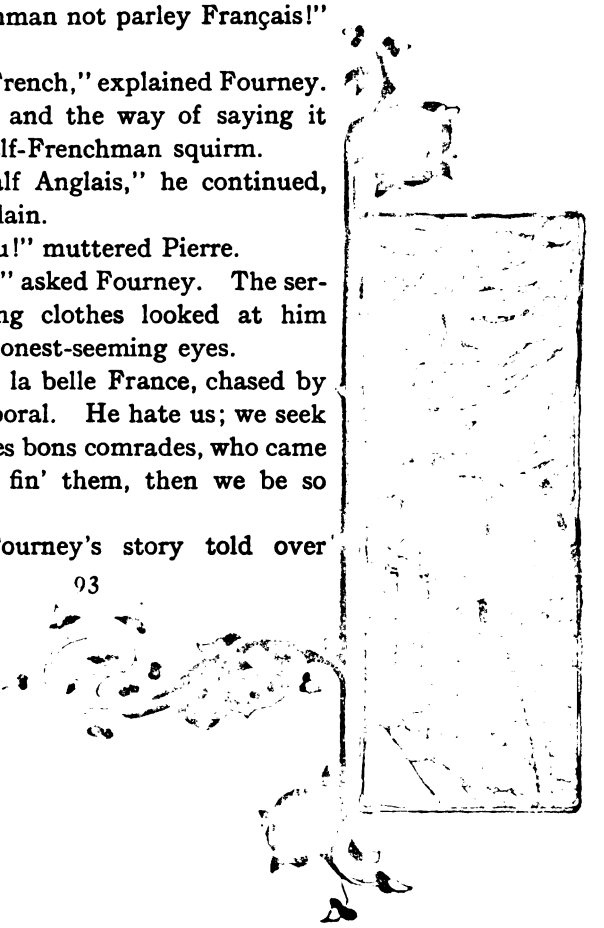
"Other half Anglais," he continued, eager to explain.

"Mon Dieu!" muttered Pierre.

"An' you?" asked Fourney. The servant brushing clothes looked at him with wide, honest-seeming eyes.

"We from la belle France, chased by ze leetle corporal. He hate us; we seek comrades—les bons comrades, who came before. We fin' them, then we be so happy."

It was Fourney's story told over



again. The man who had told it first smiled. He saw the irony, but he was equal to the occasion.

"We two—you two—alike," he cried, with enthusiasm. "Let us be four, all in one." Pierre stopped brushing Dubarre's coat, and appeared to be weighing the proposition seriously.

"That's nize," he murmured; then, hesitatingly, "If you could jes parley Français!"

Fourney rushed to vindicate himself fully now. "Father French. Come to teach ze music and ze fencing to Anglais. He marry, live in England till he die. Then me take up classes. Two years ago I get letter from my cousin, Jean Fourney, in France. He lose his speech. I go over to help him. We live on leetle farm in Normandie."

"Ah!" interrupted his listener, as though greatly relieved.

Jacques Fourney continued: "People

run us away. Say I Anglais; Anglais say I French. We be French refugees to Anglais; Englishmen to French—Voilà!" He ended with a shrug.

Big Pierre scratched his head in most contented style, all the while nodding approval and saying over and over again, "Ah! Oui, oui!" Then he went back to his clothes-brushing.

Fourney asked the next question. "You been long run away from France?"

Immediately the harpist became too excited to talk straight English.

"Long?" he cried. "Ah, ma foi! Much longer 'an if we had not been away so long."

"You mean you been a long time here?" questioned the disgusted Fourney.

Pierre looked at him with admiration. "Ah, you see, I Frenchman. How nize to talk two — Anglais, French — both well." The combination of apology and admiration in his tone was wonderful.

After that there was silence for a time. The harpist lifted the dancing-master's coat and began to shake it. As he did so a heavy ring dropped out upon the floor. With a quick "Mon Dieu!" muttered under his breath, Pierre began to search about for the ring. He brought a candle from the high mantel to help him. Fourney sat back in his chair and looked on with indifference. His companion Jean had waked up very suddenly. Now and then, when Pierre's back was turned, the pair would look quickly at each other. Pierre was too interested in his search to notice.

"Why, there it is, by ze leg o' ze table," cried Fourney, at last, from his chair. He had seen the light gleam on the gold. Pierre snatched up the ring joyfully.

"Mon Dieu! me glad!" he cried, as though immensely relieved; then added, in explanatory tone, "A present from

the Anglaise mademoiselle he teach the minuet. He would no lose it. I put it away," and he slipped the ring back in the waistcoat-pocket from which it had fallen. Then he went over, opened the closet door, and hung the waistcoat inside.

"Ma foi! If I lose it he break my back."

"He like mademoiselle?"

"He teach her," replied Pierre, diplomatically.

"Mademoiselle — great lady," ventured Fourney.

"She—a Percy," answered Dubarre's man, proudly.

"Far above poor French dancing-master."

"Or French music-teacher," was the quick reply.

"French blood good ees blood of Anglais," said Jacques.

"Diable! Yes."

"There be a French Percy—I hear of him."

Pierre's face became puzzled.

"A French Percy?" he questioned.

"Yes, Jean see him once. He come with soldiers. He ver' brave."

Pierre put his hand to his ear and stood listening intently.

"Oui, oui, monsieur, I come!" he cried; then, snatching up a coat from among those lying on the table, which happened to be a coat of Fourney's, he rushed out through the door, slipping on the garment as he ran. The two men left in the room looked after him in mute surprise. Then they looked at each other.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed the dumb Jean Fourney.

Jacques Fourney turned quickly to the supposed dumb man. "Are you sure, Jean—sure?"

"Yes, sure," cried the assistant,

eagerly. "The smaller one, he is Percy Latapie. I saw him in France, when he was awarded the cross of the Legion for stealing the English plans."

"Then the five hundred guineas reward and the hundred pounds offered by Wellington are ours," exclaimed Fourney.

"Not till we get the soldiers and have him arrested," answered his practical assistant.

"We'll go now," declared Fourney. "My 'French' won't stand the strain longer."

"Our going might make him suspicious," objected Jean.

"Pshaw! by starting now we can have the soldiers here before noon to-morrow. He can't get far by then. Let us leave through the window before that man Pierre gets back. If he suspected, the fighter Percy would kill us both."

Quickly they prepared to go. Pierre had taken Jacques Fourney's coat, so

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the spy appropriated one belonging to Dubarre.

As they were leaving, Jean paused. "That ring," he said, and got it from the waistcoat hanging in the closet. Fourney looked at it.

"That's proof enough," he cried—"the St. Croix seal!" And putting the ring in his pocket, Fourney led the way out through the window.

Pierre had some difficulty in finding the dancing-master. He ran all the way to the garden, then was compelled to wait, for Dubarre stood talking to Captain Thorncliffe and could not be disturbed. At last the harpist, nearly consumed now in the fever of his own impatience, got his chance to tell of the strange Frenchmen he had left in the room.

"And he could not speak French?" said Dubarre, in surprise.

"Only English, monsieur," replied Pierre, positively.

"Come, I'll sample it. Mayhap he'll wish both were deaf and dumb."

They hurried to the lodge and threw open the door. A gust of air from the open window met them, and the flickering candle showed the room to be empty.

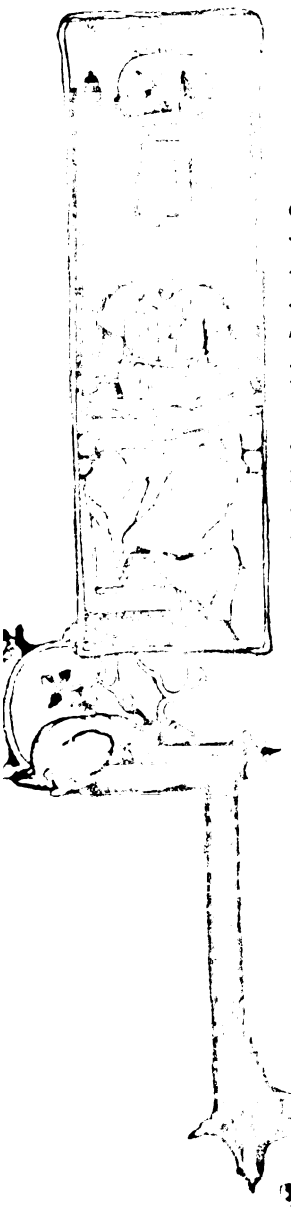
"Why, Pierre, what have you done with the guests?"

The dancing-master asked the question, stopping to laugh at his assistant. Pierre was running about the room like a dog that had lost a trail. He rushed to the closet and looked under the bed, but no Jacques Fourney, no dumb Jean appeared. Then the man stood gazing at Dubarre in mute perplexity.

"They seem to have gone, Pierre. How was it?"

The other could only look at the window and mutter:

"It was closed when I left."



"Ah!"

Dubarre stepped quickly to the window and held a candle outside. There were footprints on the grass. He put the candle back on the mantel, fastened the shutters, and closed the window. Then he looked at Pierre, and Pierre looked at him.

"They've gone," said Dubarre, after a moment of staring. "Certainly our fellow-countrymen act queerly. One cannot talk French, the other cannot talk at all; and now they leave us suddenly through a window."

"Well, one of them left a coat," remarked Pierre, after the manner of a man seeking small comfort.

"How do you know that?"

"Because I have it on now, myself, and a tight fit it is. I took it to keep him from running away while I went for you."

"What did he wear?"



Pierre looked all about the room and in the closet.

"Mon Dieu! He took yours, monsieur," he said, at last, with a wry grimace.

"My coat gone? My waistcoat, then," asked Dubarre, sharply.

Pierre brought it out. Dubarre felt in the pockets quickly.

"My signet-ring gone, too," he cried, "and that's worse. At home it's a family treasure, here a family peril."

"How, monsieur?"

"Why, it points out the man on whom it is found as one England is hunting."

"I'll get it, monsieur," and Pierre started for the door.

"Come back!" cried Dubarre; "to claim it would bring disaster on both of us. Let's see the coat he left."

Pierre took off the garment and handed it to him. The dancing-master looked it over, then tried it on.

"I'll travel in it, since he got mine. What do you think?" He pulled at the coat to make it fit better. "'Tis lucky we are of a size, this strange Frenchman and I." Then he felt a small, hard substance. "Oho, a snuff-box!" he cried, pulling it from his pocket. "I'll test the brand monsieur the thief uses."

He opened the box, but it contained only a thin paper doubled and rolled into as small compass as possible. Dubarre straightened it out. As he looked at the paper his face changed suddenly.

"French refugees, Pierre! French renegades, rather! Low-born English spies, this Fourney and his man Jean. See! Look at this!" He held the paper towards the other in great excitement. "Indeed, we leave in good time."

"Spies! Low English thieves!" cried Pierre, in turn, looking at the paper.

"Come, come, Pierre!" exclaimed Dubarre, "you must away, and at once. I'll stay until to-morrow to put out a false trail. Here!" He ran to the bed, and from a cunningly constructed hiding-place drew out a bag of money. "Take this. Get your horse where we left it, at the second farm. Ride like mad to the cove. It's barely twenty-five miles. Have the boat lie off every night for a week, in case I am delayed. Three lights, triangle, in the rigging will be the sign. Are you ready?"

While he was talking, Pierre, with soldier-like alacrity, had been at work. Now he stood holding a small bundle of clothes that looked suspiciously like a mere excuse for hidden pistols.

"Monsieur, may not the spies come back for you?"

"No, no, Pierre, I'll risk it. I'll put out false reports to confuse Percys, spies, English—all."



Some one knocked lightly at the door. Dubarre half drew a small clasp-knife, then, remembering himself, went calmly to answer the knock.

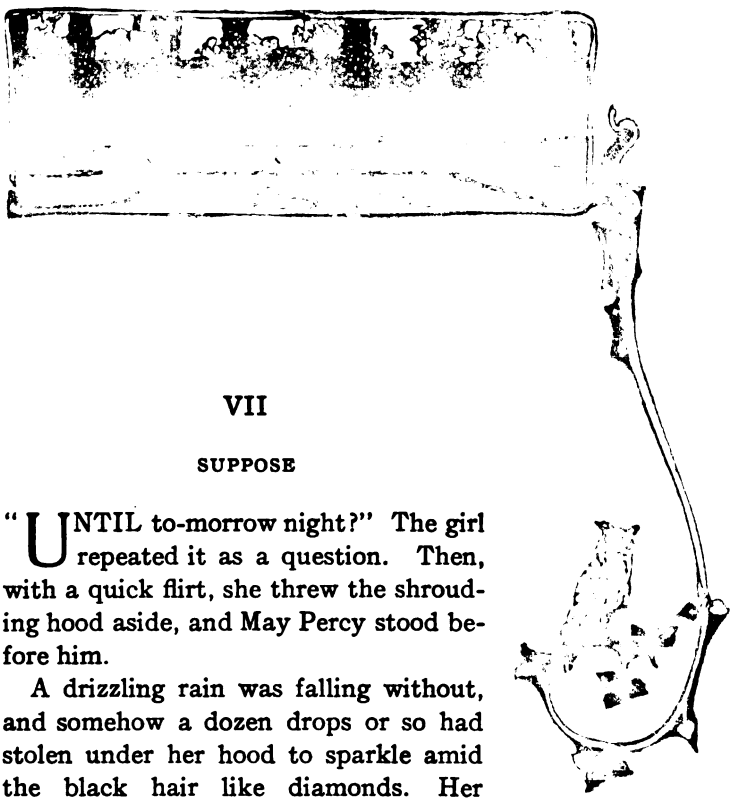
"Bon voyage, Pierre," he whispered, his hand on the latch. Then he opened the door.

A girl muffled in a cape, with the hood drawn over her face, slipped quickly into the room. Astonished, Pierre started back. Dubarre put his finger to his lips.

"Until to-morrow night," he muttered to Pierre, and, bowing, the man slipped from the room.

Dubarre closed the door after him and turned to face his visitor.





VII

SUPPOSE

"UNTIL to-morrow night?" The girl repeated it as a question. Then, with a quick flirt, she threw the shrouding hood aside, and May Percy stood before him.

A drizzling rain was falling without, and somehow a dozen drops or so had stolen under her hood to sparkle amid the black hair like diamonds. Her cheeks were red from hurrying. Her eyes, big, eager, questioning, sought his.

Dubarre drew a long breath. "Yes," he said.

May Percy gave a quick, relieved laugh. "Why, I need not have hurried

so. You did not speak to me, so I came to tell you good-bye."

She extended her hand. After a scant moment he dropped it, as something not to be safely held.

"Mademoiselle knew I was going?" he asked.

"Yes, Captain Thorncliffe told me."

Dubarre frowned. "The captain! I asked him not to tell."

"So he said. You were to leave early in the morning—and what a shame it was none of us would get to tell you good-bye after you had been so kind. He was coming to-night, he thought, and I decided I would, too, because I was afraid I might not wake up in time and you would be gone."

She had rushed through it all in a breath, for Dubarre was still frowning. Now he bowed to her ceremoniously.

"Mademoiselle is very kind, but also



very imprudent. Did mademoiselle bring her maid along?"

At that Mistress Percy's face showed only startled, innocent surprise.

"No, why should I? I was not afraid. Besides—" She hesitated.

"Besides?" he asked.

"I did not want them to know," she blurted out, impulsively.

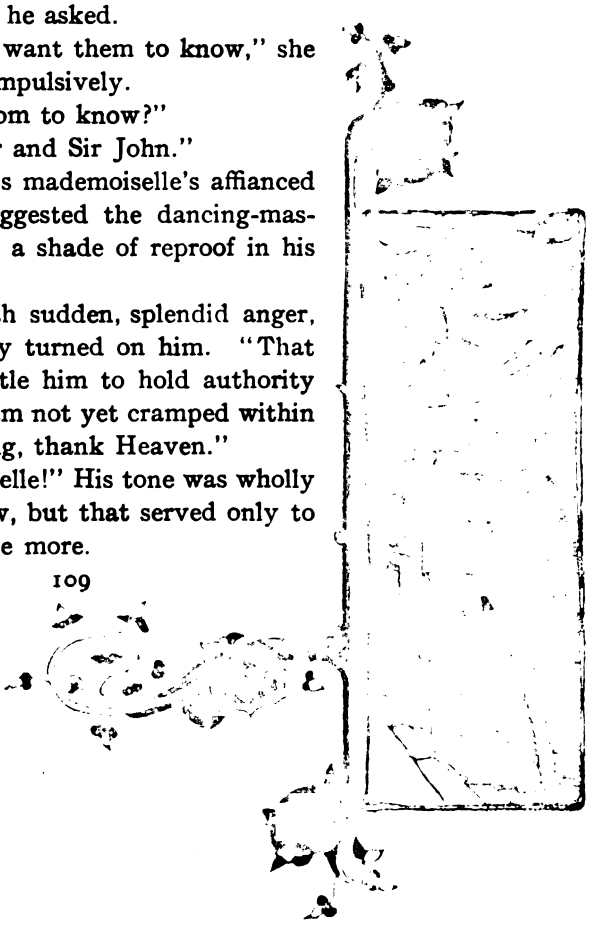
"Want whom to know?"

"My father and Sir John."

"Sir John is mademoiselle's affianced husband," suggested the dancing-master, with just a shade of reproof in his speech.

Blazing with sudden, splendid anger, Mistress Percy turned on him. "That does not entitle him to hold authority over me. I am not yet cramped within a wedding-ring, thank Heaven."

"Mademoiselle!" His tone was wholly reproving now, but that served only to enrage her the more.



"Oh, you needn't take his part. I believe all you men are alike. I hate you all. I'm sure I do." And, whirling away from him, she stood drumming her fingers on the table. Dubarre shook his head despairingly. When he spoke it was in a suave, soothing tone.

"Mademoiselle is excited. May I get a glass of water for mademoiselle?"

May Percy turned back impatiently. "Now, don't take that tone. You'll be like my father next. I say some one has been kind to me, and I will see him to say good-bye, and thank him. And then, forsooth, Sir John"—she paused, then went on with sneering contempt—"the righteous, proper Sir John, who has lost half a fortune at cards and fought once about a girl, must throw up his hands in holy horror, and my father grow sarcastic and suggest that I go over to-night to pay a formal visit to ex-

press my thanks in person for a paid service. Oh, I despise you men!"

She was miserably angry, but of a sudden her old April self predominated. An arch smile broke through the clouds on her face, and a gay laugh at some new thought swept away all trace of gloom.

"Do you really suppose, monsieur, my father meant that seriously? Am I not a dutiful daughter?" She stopped, struggling to contain her laughter.

At the angry outburst, Dubarre had started to walk up and down the room. This last change was too much for a man helplessly, hopelessly in love. There was but one salvation. He stopped and bowed stiffly.

"I know one thing, which is, mademoiselle must be going."

It was a command.

Mistress Percy drew herself up proudly. "And you, too, Monsieur Propriety

—forgive me. I had not properly estimated the dancing-master. He fairly bristles with unexpectedness. Possibly"—with the dainty, sarcastic smile that only made her face the more adorable—"monsieur has lost a whole fortune at cards and fought two duels over two girls."

Plagued, tempted past all endurance, the Frenchman lost his head. "A dozen would be nearer," he blurted, in sudden anger.

For a moment May Percy looked at him helplessly. Then the meaning of it all swept over her. She drew a long breath, while her eyes grew big and anxious.

"Then monsieur is—"

He interrupted quickly. "Gaston Dubarre, poor French dancing-master." Next he drew back, and, with a low bow, added, "To Mistress Percy, grand lady."

Slowly the eagerness faded out of the

girl's face. Her head drooped as she held out her hand kindly.

"Forgive me, monsieur. I did not mean to intrude upon a possible secret."

The Frenchman raised the hand to his lips.

"Mademoiselle's own heart's kindness makes her forgiveness," he said, brokenly.

"And I shall think—"

Dubarre shrugged his shoulders. "'Twere a foolish man who would try to curb a woman's thought, mademoiselle."

She continued: "That a French gentleman, a soldier, perhaps, has honored a little English girl by teaching her to dance."

Now he shook his head, smiling slightly, but when he spoke his tone was deeply serious.

"And a poor French dancing-master will know that le bon Dieu permits some-

times one of His own bright children to steal down from above to give those struggling below jes' one leetle foretaste, a promise of the kingdom of le bon Dieu. Then — He snatches it away."

With a shrug the man walked to the mantel and leaned against it, dejected, hopeless beyond further speech. The girl's face was a reflection of his attitude. After a pause she spoke timidly:

"But the children from above, as you call them, they stay on earth, monsieur."

He turned and came to her quickly, sudden resolve in every movement.

"Mademoiselle," he said, and now in turn his tone was eager, "could a man pretend to be what he is not?"

"That would depend, monsieur," she interrupted, softly.

"Suppose, mademoiselle" — Dubarre spoke more carefully, weighing every word—"suppose a man had sworn an

oath to her he loved best in the world." May Percy started. "Suppose, mademoiselle—" He smiled. "Ah, this is all a leetle game of suppose, that young man gets release from his chief, forswears his friends, for a time gives up his life, and, meanly attired, at great peril attempts to follow out the oath made to her he loved most as she lay dying."

The Frenchman paused. His quick eye had noted the girl's signs of embarrassment.

"Is the little game of suppose too long, mademoiselle?"

"Go on, monsieur." Her tone was ample encouragement. He took up the game again more eagerly.

"Suppose, then, mademoiselle, he fulfils his oath. Could you"—a moment he paused for a word—"respect that man?"

"Yes—yes, monsieur," she cried, impulsively.

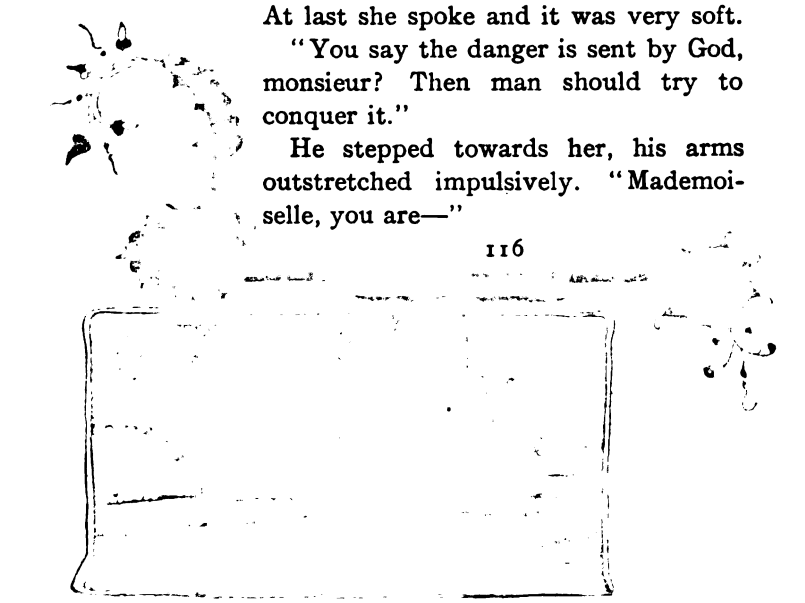
Dubarre shook his head, smiling sadly.

"You speak too quick, mademoiselle; the game, our leetle 'suppose' game, is not finished. Suppose, mademoiselle, that young man met danger, great danger, greater than he knew. You know the danger, mademoiselle. It is the light that le bon Dieu puts by life's sea to save or wreck men—a woman. If he steers headlong, reckless, willing to die on the rocks, if only struggling for that light, could you—could you think such a man worthy?" He paused for a reply.

May Percy stood at the edge of dreamland, looking into the far away. At last she spoke and it was very soft.

"You say the danger is sent by God, monsieur? Then man should try to conquer it."

He stepped towards her, his arms outstretched impulsively. "Mademoiselle, you are—"



She straightened and looked at him quickly. He stopped, for in that look there was some strange mingling of weakness, of sad determination against desire, and of appeal that awed him. When she spoke, in so far as it could the tone echoed the look.

"As you were about to say, the affianced wife of Sir John Wilmerding, and you a French gentleman, monsieur."

He stepped back and bowed deeply, then moved towards the door.

"May I have the honor of seeing mademoiselle safely to the house?"

And then, almost as he said it, the door shook from a mighty pounding.



VIII

WIT AGAINST RAPIER, WITH THE CLOCK FOR JUDGE

AGAIN the door rattled and shook under the weight of a hammering sword-hilt. Within the room the man and girl, struck still, stared blankly at each other. Surprise, dark anger, quick, blushing shame, and, last, white fear succeeded in her face. Her lips trembled, the hands clasped and unclasped nervously. Thrice she essayed to speak and could not; only the eyes spoke plainly her fright and her appeal. Dubarre recovered first.

"Who is there?" he shouted, and the tone was not that of the humble dancing-master in the least.



From without sounded a voice, hoarse with anger.

"Open! Open! 'Tis I. Open quickly!"

"Sir John!" It came at last, a low, faint gasp of horror from May Percy. Now she realized her false position—Dubarre's consideration of it. "What can I do?" she begged, low.

Silent, lightly as a cat, the Frenchman sprang to the door and noiselessly turned the key. Another second and he was back beside her.

"Sh!" he whispered. Then aloud: "And who may 'I' be? No unknown I's have entrée here." Again he whispered to the girl, "Try the window." As in a dream, she tiptoed to it, but the heavy shutter was closed and barred.

"Open! Open at once, I say!" Sir John's voice bore wild rage now. Every instant the door threatened to give way under his furious assault.



May Percy had stolen back to Dubarre. "The shutter—I can't manage it," she whispered, faintly.

And now from beyond the door another voice broke in upon them. "'Tis Sir John Wilmerding and I, Captain Thorncliffe. We wish to speak with you, Monsieur Dubarre."

"Captain Thorncliffe! Oh, I'm lost!" and, moaning thus piteously, May Percy seemed about to faint. Dubarre caught her almost roughly by the arm.

"Keep courage. You must hide," he muttered. His touch restored her. The Percy pluck began to assert itself. Her mouth set, and she looked at him understandingly. Aloud he cried:

"Pardon, messieurs, pardon. I'm coming," and he started noisily for the door. The pounding without ceased.

"Well, hurry," shouted Sir John Wilmerding. "We can't wait all night."

May Percy rushed behind the bed.

Dubarre darted after her. "Not here," he muttered, fiercely — "the closet." Then he sprang to the mantel, knocked off the candlesticks and kicked over an andiron to make a big crash.

"Mon Dieu!" he cried, loudly angry. "There goes the candle. That comes of being in a hurry." Next he was beside May Percy, opening the closet door and shouting all at once.

"Patience, messieurs! In a moment —when I get a light."

Sir John Wilmerding was becoming wilder every second of delay.

"We'll make light enough when we get in," he roared.

Dubarre had stepped into the closet with May Percy. Now they came out, he shaking his head.

"Hopeless!"

"Can nothing be done?" whispered the girl, in low tones of agony.

Again the man shook his head. "I



can't kill both." Thus they stood gazing at each other, twin statues of despair.

From without the stern voice of Captain Thorncliffe punctuated their lethargy.

"Open, Dubarre, immediately, or we'll force a way." And again a sword-hilt began playing upon the door.

As at a death-bed one looks for the time, now Dubarre raised his eyes. His searching gaze, wandering from the girl, found the face of the big clock. Suddenly his own face brightened. Aloud, in laughing tones, almost triumphant, he cried:

"Mon Dieu! Don't, captain; I'm coming."

Seizing May Percy by the arm, he hustled her with desperate speed over to the big clock. The door of it came open easily. "Be quiet and trust me," he whispered. A moment more and the

girl was locked in behind the wooden door. And the face of the clock above told nothing of it.

"I'm coming, messieurs, I'm coming." Dubarre was leaping across the room for the other door. And as he sprang by he jerked off his coat and threw it on the table. Quickly he turned the lock and threw open the door with a grand flourish.

"What has brought the humble dancing-master this honor?" asked the obsequious, bowing Frenchman, as Sir John Wilmerding and Captain Thorncliffe crossed the threshold.

"Are gentlemen to be kept waiting by a paid jumping-jack?" demanded Sir John Wilmerding, striding to the centre of the room.

For the fifth time the dancing-master bowed to his waist.

"But see, monsieur," he protested; "I did not stop even to finish dressing."

Captain Thorncliffe turned impatiently to his companion.

"Come, Jack. We are not here to bandy words. State what you want."

The Frenchman looked from one to the other. "Messieurs, what has happened? You are wearing swords. Do you expect attack. What can be the matter?" In surprise and sudden anxiety he piled questions one upon another.

"Matter enough!" roared Wilmerding. "We are searching for Mistress Percy."

Dubarre was the picture of horrified astonishment. "Mon Dieu!" he cried. "has some beast stolen her?" He rushed to the table and began slipping on his coat. "For her, I, too, could wear a sword." He ran back and, seizing Sir John by the arm, began pulling him towards the door, all the while crying, "But, come, come, monsieur,



we are losing time—your betrothed may be—"

Sir John shook him off with a fierce oath, so that the smaller Frenchman staggered back several paces.

"Scoundrel, she's here!"

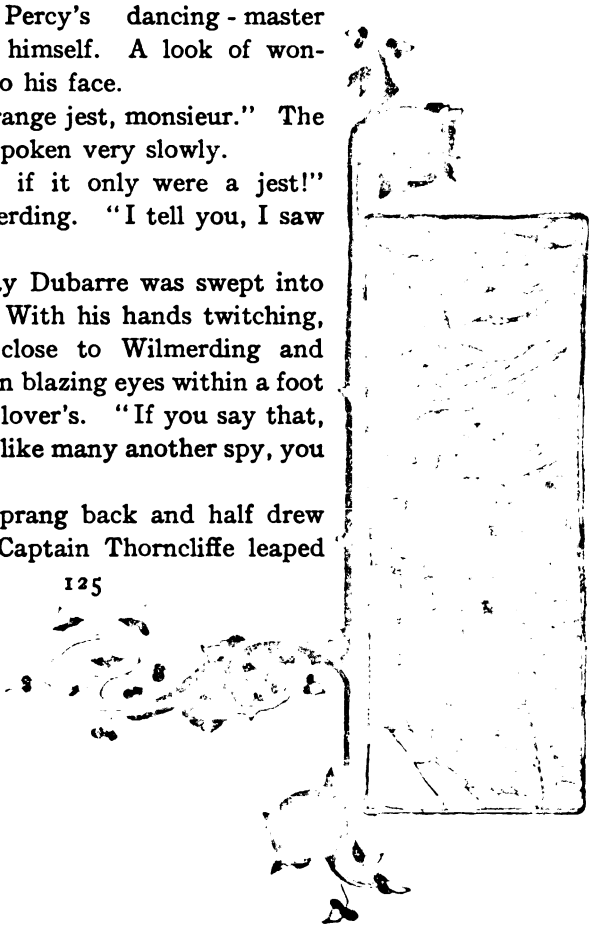
Mistress Percy's dancing-master straightened himself. A look of wonder crept into his face.

"'Tis a strange jest, monsieur." The words were spoken very slowly.

"By God! if it only were a jest!" roared Wilmerding. "I tell you, I saw her come."

Straightway Dubarre was swept into equal rage. With his hands twitching, he stepped close to Wilmerding and thrust his own blazing eyes within a foot of the angry lover's. "If you say that, Englishman, like many another spy, you lie."

Sir John sprang back and half drew his sword. Captain Thorncliffe leaped



beside him in time to catch his arm.

"Steady, Jack, steady," advised the Captain, soothingly. "I knew there must be some mistake."

The Frenchman's anger had changed to cold contempt now.

"And a mistake monsieur will rue when Mistress Percy hears of it," he sneered.

Sir John Wilmerding shook off the restraining arm bitterly.

"Loose me, Hal. By the Lord! I tell you I saw her come not twenty minutes ago. I watched the door and sent for you that I might have witness when I killed the low-born lover."

He turned again fiercely on the sneering Frenchman.

"Quiet, Jack; be calm," soothed Captain Thorncliffe.

Dubarre bowed with most exaggerated politeness.

"Monsieur greatly honors the poor dancing-master when he admits him as a rival."

"And you, Dubarre, be silent," ordered Thorncliffe, sternly.

Again the Frenchman bowed humbly.

"The poor dancing-master should always strive to please monsieur. And, of a truth, if I'm to die for it, it pains me deeply that, dying, I cannot at the last please Sir John by producing the lady." His manner expressed only great sorrow that his failure to do so should give the lover pain.

Sir John shot black looks all about the room.

"If she's here we'll find her," he declared, fiercely.

Eagerly Dubarre seized the opportunity for vindication.

"Yes, yes. Let us search." As he spoke he rushed to the bed and laid hold on the curtains. Sir John winced visibly

at that. It did not escape the Frenchman. Still holding the cloth, he turned, blandly questioning.

"Pray, where did the titled lover expect to find his mistress? Was she discussing theology with the humble dancing-master?" Then, without waiting for reply, he jerked down the curtains, drew them off the bed, and began to shake them in violent style.

"Is the fellow mad? What are you doing?" demanded Captain Thorncliffe.

Dubarre looked up apologetically. "One never can tell, monsieur. I thought perhaps a girl, a half-girl, or possibly a girl and a half might be hidden in the curtains."

"Damnation!" roared Wilmerding, while Thorncliffe exclaimed, sternly:

"Dubarre, enough of this trifling."

The dancing-master was all eagerness to please. "As monsieur le capitaine wishes," he said, suavely; "but monsieur

knows all manner of queer things may happen when a titled lover traces his affianced bride to the room of an abject dancing-master." Then, turning from the captain to Sir John, he made a gesture towards the mattress. "Will monsieur thrust his sword into the bed?" The lover winced again. "I'm sure," added Dubarre, with great earnestness, "she must scream if it touches her."

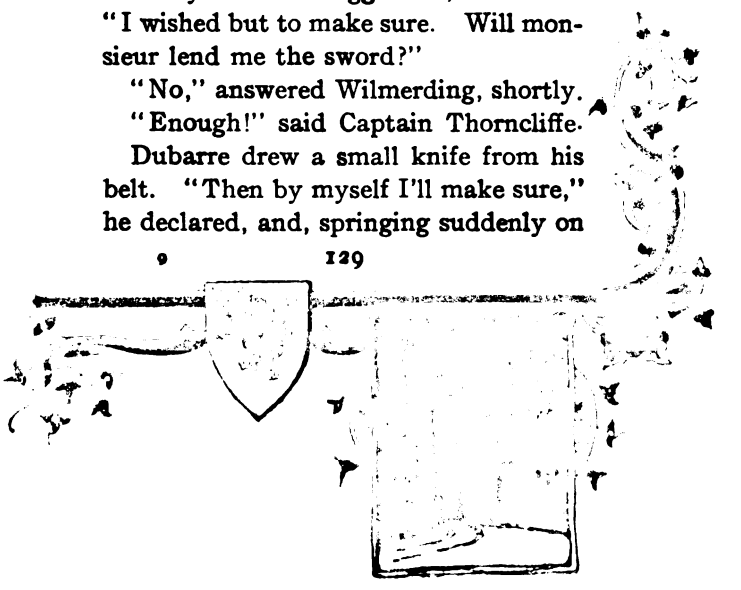
"Cease such unseemly jesting," shouted the badgered one.

The Frenchman became mildly aggrieved. "I did not jest, monsieur. 'Twas your own suggestion," he said. "I wished but to make sure. Will monsieur lend me the sword?"

"No," answered Wilmerding, shortly.

"Enough!" said Captain Thorncliffe.

Dubarre drew a small knife from his belt. "Then by myself I'll make sure," he declared, and, springing suddenly on



the bed, thrust the knife repeatedly into the mattress.

"Is it enough?" he asked, after a dozen thrusts, looking up.

"Come down, Dubarre," ordered Thorncliffe, laughing in spite of himself.

The Frenchman climbed down; then, looking at his work, apostrophized the bed regretfully. "Poor bed, it was cruel treatment after the many times you have comforted me, but"—shaking his head sadly—"when ladies of fashion seek by night the rooms of renegade dancing-masters, then all things must be changed about."

Sir John had moved over beside the mantel. "The window—she might have gotten out by this."

Then he and Captain Thorncliffe struggled with the bar. It took several minutes of tussling before the heavy shutter moved back. Dubarre laughed and thanked them for doing something

that he had been unable to do for himself.

Now the searchers stood perplexed. The simple room seemed to afford no other hiding-place. Suddenly Wilmerding caught sight of the closet door. He trembled as nothing since his entrance had made him tremble. Here was the quarry run to earth at last.

"The closet!" he exclaimed, and rushed towards it, crying: "Watch the French scoundrel, Hal. Don't let him escape."

Dubarre's lips were smiling. About the eyes he had grown ten years. Then Wilmerding stumbled against the clock. The Frenchman's smile seemed frozen on his face.

"Damn the clock!" cried the lover, and reached for the closet door.

"Poor clock!" murmured the dancing-master. And, as Wilmerding paused before the door, he added, "For a man



who has sought so earnestly, Sir John Wilmerding displays rare diffidence at meeting his betrothed."

Sir John whirled that way and drew his sword. "Be still, Frenchman."

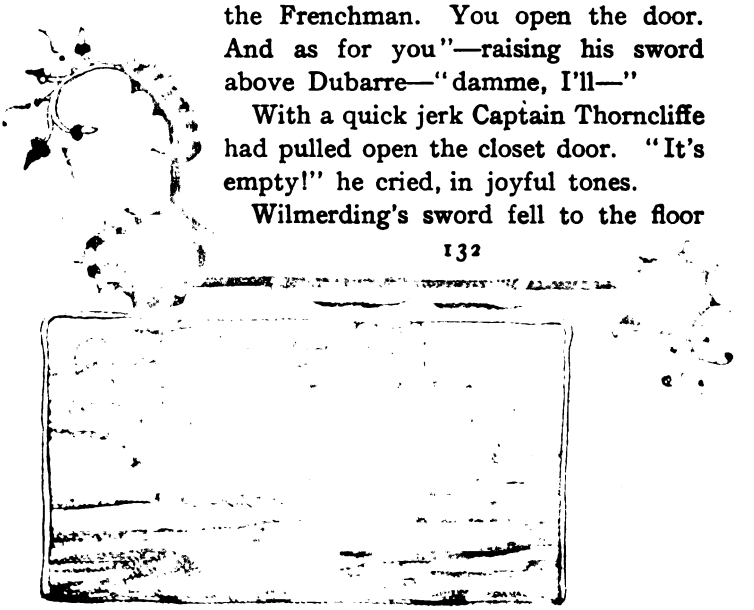
The other only continued in the same reflective tone. "If a titled lover cannot keep his betrothed from the room of a poor dancing-master before marriage, how difficult afterwards it should be to hold the wife from gentlemen of fashion and soldiers."

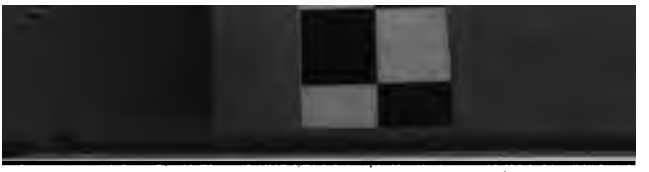
Wilmerding still wavered before the closed door.

"Hal," he said, at last, "I'm not myself. I can't face her. Let me watch the Frenchman. You open the door. And as for you"—raising his sword above Dubarre—"damme, I'll—"

With a quick jerk Captain Thorncliffe had pulled open the closet door. "It's empty!" he cried, in joyful tones.

Wilmerding's sword fell to the floor





with a crash. The lover shook a moment for very joy.

"Thank God!" he said, earnestly, at last.

The Frenchman looked at both with a sneer. "Are you quite sure, messieurs?" he asked.

"I was before I came," declared Thorncliffe, heartily.

Dubarre turned now on Wilmerding.

"'Twas a brave deed, monsieur, for the titled lover with sword on hip to insult the poor, unarmed dancing-master."

"No harm was done," blurted Sir John, the more brutally to cover his confusion.

The Frenchman merely looked at him. "Doubtless Mistress Percy will be glad to hear that she was proven innocent," he said.

Captain Thorncliffe had to bite his lips at that. "Don't push Jack so hard, Dubarre," he urged.

The dancing-master continued, to Sir John: "But is monsieur sure — quite sure—that she is innocent? One never can tell of women. Is there not some other place to look? Possibly she may have hidden behind the face of the clock! It stopped this morning. A shaking-up may do it good."

Captain Thorncliffe felt called upon to interfere. "Enough! enough! Dubarre," he begged. "Don't you see he's sorry?"

"Yes," said Wilmerding, angrily. "I'm sorry—damned sorry." He thrust his sword in its scabbard and stalked towards the door.

The Frenchman looked after the departing lover. "One would think he was sorry he had not found her," said the vindicated man, sarcastically.

Captain Thorncliffe held out his hand. "I know you will say nothing of this, Dubarre. I am grieved mad jealousy

should have led Jack to such folly. You have acted splendidly throughout."

Dubarre smiled as they shook hands. "You should know," he said; then added: "'Twas sad. Pierre came in wearing a long cloak 'gainst the rain, but went away again without it. That fooled him. Good-night, monsieur."

Captain Thorncliffe followed Sir John Wilmerding out. Dubarre locked the door after them. Next he straightened, with a monstrous sigh of relief, and in the candle-light his face was lined with a great fatigue. A moment he stood thus, then stepped quickly across the room. He turned the key and opened the door of the clock.

"They are gone, mademoiselle. Now, I shall see you safely to the house."

From her narrow hiding-place the girl looked out on him with her eyes full of a wonderful light that had never showed there so plainly before.

"For my good name, what return can I make to the noblest gentleman I ever knew?" she asked.

Dubarre bowed low over her extended hand.

"None to the dancing-master—just now, mademoiselle," he said, with meaning.

Then Mistress Percy stepped out from the clock. And, as she did so, the figures of two men passed the window. Sir John Wilmerding on the outside, started forward, but Captain Thorncliffe thrust one hand over the lover's mouth and pushed him back into the shadow. And from the captain's lips came the muttered exclamation:

"By God, she was in the clock!"

IX

A WAR-OFFICE SPECIAL

CAPTAIN THORNCLIFFE cast the week-old *Gazette* aside with an impatient gesture.

"Nothing in the damned paper," he muttered; then went on smoking furiously and thinking just as hard.

Truly the genial captain had enough to occupy his mind. First, there was the Courtleigh girl, who had been most strangely perverse of late, even for her. She always took a large share of the captain's thoughts. Then loomed up Wilmerding's love affair, with the complication of May Percy's visit to the dancing-master's room the night before.

When they saw her through the win-

dow, by main force Thorncliffe had kept the jealous lover from rushing in to kill the Frenchman. They had followed Dubarre and the girl from the lodge to the big house and witnessed the most respectful adieu. With great difficulty the watchers had crept so close that they could overhear Dubarre thank Mistress Percy for her kindness in coming to tell him good-bye, and deplore the necessity that compelled him to hide her in the clock to save appearances.

Dubarre had kissed her hand respectfully and gone away. The girl had seemed stunned, or sad, or not herself, or something, for Thorncliffe could swear she said only: "Adieu, monsieur. May Heaven keep you safe!"

Now all these things were sufficient to worry the blunt soldier. He had declared earnestly to Wilmerding that he believed the visit innocent, and had induced the jealous lover to promise to

wait until Dubarre had gone, then get a quiet explanation from Mistress Percy. Whether or not the hot-tempered Sir John could keep his head and his promise was an open question. The captain had come out to his favorite bench on the lawn, the one at which Pierre had played for the feast, to consider the matter.

But thinking did no good, and impatiently he turned back to the discarded *Gazette*. He picked it up again, and almost as he did so his glance caught an item that made him start. He took his pipe from his mouth to whistle, then laid it on the bench while he read the item through, his eyes all the time growing bigger from astonishment, until at the close he slapped his leg and burst out with a hearty roar.

"By the Lord Harry! it's just like him."

Ethel Courtleigh, coming along the

garden-path, heard the enthusiastic roar.

"Just like who, captain?" she asked.

Captain Thorncliffe sprang to his feet and snatched off his cap, all confusion.

"I—er—ah—beg pardon — 'deed I do, Mistress Courtleigh. I—er—didn't know you were there."

"I think you might ask me to sit down," she said, laughing at his confusion.

Now the captain's idea of war was to go right after the enemy.

"May I have that rose?" It was his very first question after they sat down.

She looked at him in mock surprise. "Why, how impetuous you soldiers are! You'd take a town before you begin the siege."

"Some citadels are best taken by storm," he answered, meaningly.

Mistress Courtleigh threw up her head. "No, sir," she sniffed. "This



rose shall be a reward of merit. I'll give it to you when you tell me what interested you in the paper just now."

Thorncliffe shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, that," he said, carelessly.

"'Oh, that,'" she mocked him. "Yes, you said, 'It's just like him.' Now just like who?"

"Why, that harum-scarum young fool, Percy Latapie, of course. The scapegrace is in England."

"The French Percy in England!" cried the girl, in horrified tones.

"Truly."

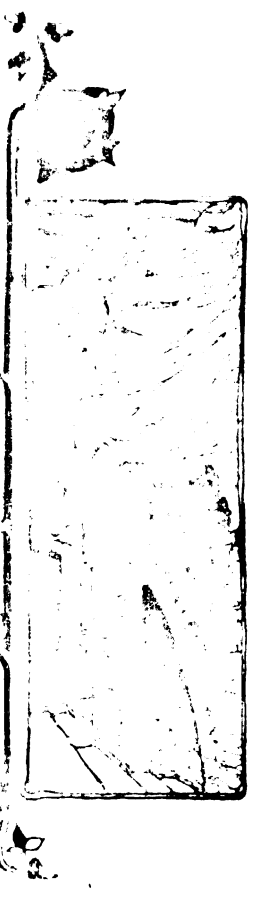
"Why, we shall all be killed," she exclaimed, in mock terror.

"Or led captive," he laughed, slyly.

"But how do you know?"

"Listen." The captain picked up the paper and began to read:

"'Word has just reached the War Office that the notorious bandit, known as "French Percy," has left France and is supposed to be



in England. Heretofore his disappearance from the French army has always presaged some disaster to England. He is the man who entered the English camp in the guise of a trooper and stole the papers of the commander-in-chief, escaping safely with them and delivering them into the hands of the French marshal, Soult. Numerous other desperate enterprises are credited to this Percy Latapie. It is said to be his boast that he has never failed in anything yet undertaken. From a source within the French lines it has been learned that "French Percy" asked leave of Napoleon, saying that he wished to visit his family home in England, in accordance with the dying wish of his mother, who passed away a year ago. His mother belonged to the well-known family of Percys on the east coast. She ran away years ago with the young Vicomte de St. Croix. The family estate, by entail, has become the property of Sir Henry Percy, a stanch Tory, who would be only too glad to deliver over his renegade cousin. The place is now being watched. It is safe to wager that "French Percy" will fail in this, his last daring escapade, or, if he gets to the castle, will certainly be captured. In that event the death of a spy awaits him. A reward of five hundred guineas has long stood for the body of this Percy Latapie, dead or alive. The commander-in-chief himself offers,

in addition, one hundred pounds for the capture of "French Percy."'"

The captain paused and looked up. "And to think that little more than five and one-half feet of dead scapegrace should be worth six hundred pounds."

"But he is such a brave soldier," said Mistress Courtleigh.

"Do girls always love brave soldiers?" asked Captain Thorncliffe.

"Would Sir Henry Percy arrest his cousin?" she countered.

"Of course," answered the captain.

"And you?" she persisted.

"Perhaps," he laughed. "You see, I owe him one. I'll ride over to the garrison to-day and tell them to be on the lookout."

"Will you take your reward before you go?" she smiled, holding up the rose tantalizingly before him.

"And more too!" he cried, seizing both hand and flower in his big grasp.

The girl gave a little scream. "What a grip, captain! Do you always "—archly—"always squeeze so hard?"

"I—I—didn't mean to hurt," he blundered. "You know, Ethel, I beg—I mean—"

She interrupted, laughing: "Come, I'll tell your fortune with the flower."

They bent over side by side with their heads very close together. She held the flower, he pulled off the petals, and as one they repeated:

"One I love,
Two I love,
Three I love, I say;
Four I love with all my heart—"

Unnoticed, May Percy had slipped across the lawn. She crept just behind the pair on the bench, then put her hands over her eyes.

"I'm not looking."

As if by magic, the soldier and the girl stood upright a good yard apart.

"We were—er—just seeing how many leaves there are on a rose," murmured Mistress Courtleigh, confusedly, holding up a dilapidated flower.

May Percy came gayly around the bench to kiss her blushing friend. "And to think, sweet, that I never knew before you were near-sighted!" she said, sympathetically; then, turning to Captain Thorncliffe: "And how hard it must be on a brave soldier to have poor eyes. How can you see to shoot? And yet, they say you are a famous shot."

Captain Thorncliffe drew himself up stiffly.

"My eyes are very good," he said. "Sometimes they see strange things."

Like a flash came the reply: "And being an English soldier, the tongue never tells them. But, captain, would you ask Sir John Wilmerding to meet me here? I wish to speak to him."

Her woman's intuition told her that

they knew. The Percy headlong courage sought quick battle, if it must come.

Captain Thorncliffe bowed ceremoniously. "Certainly, Mistress Percy," he said, and started away to find Sir John.

May Percy turned to her friend. "Now, sweetheart, what were you doing? Tell me all about it."

Ethel Courtleigh's face showed only blank surprise. "Doing? Why, nothing," she said, "but reading in the paper about your cousin."

"My cousin?" asked Mistress Percy.

"Yes, the French Percy, your over-the-water cousin. Here it is," and she offered the other girl the paper.

May Percy ran through the piece hastily. "Why, father would never give him up," she exclaimed, as she finished.

"Indeed, he would, though," cried Mistress Courtleigh, with conviction. "Captain Thorncliffe said so; and the captain is going to ride over to the gar-

rison this evening and warn the soldiers to be on guard."

"Eff!" A sudden wonderful thought seemed to strike May Percy. Her cheeks became red, her eyes big and sparkling. "Suppose—" she began.

"Oh, I know what you were going to say," cried the other. "I thought so, too, as I read it. You are thinking of the two Frenchmen who came yesterday and slipped away last night. The little one, he had Percy's gray eyes. I wish he had stayed. We might have found out for sure."

"Yes," said Mistress Percy, absently, "we might." Apparently she had lost all her enthusiasm, for she sat thinking deeply.

And now Captain Thorncliffe was bringing on Sir John. They came across the lawn together, talking low. "You ought to have allowed me to settle it last night," declared Wilmerding, bitterly.

Captain Thorncliffe laid a soothing hand upon his arm.

"Be calm, Jack. 'Twas but a girlish freak. All will be right. You must not fight or kill him. You should not have worn your sword."

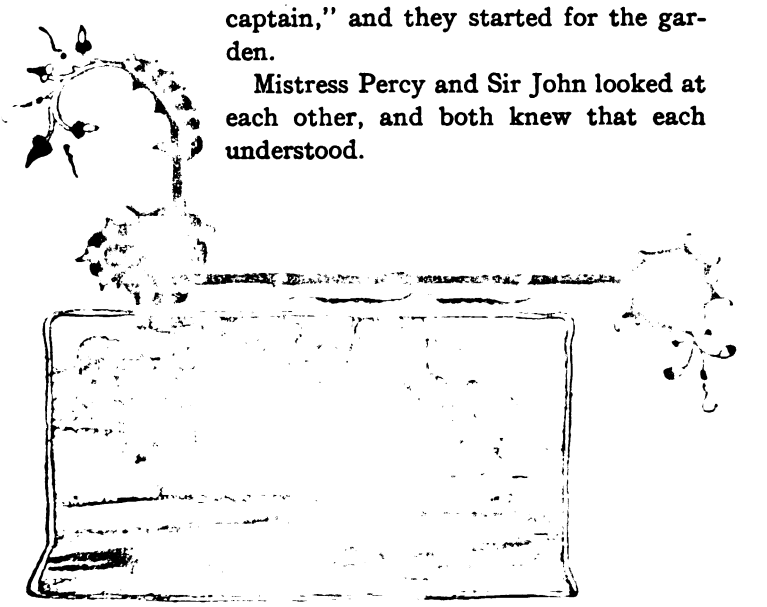
They were too close now for confidences, and the captain cried aloud to the girls, "Ah, Mistress Percy, see, I've brought your lover, and now I claim my reward."

"Do you think she is worth the service, captain?" laughed May Percy.

Mistress Courtleigh drew herself up with assumed haughtiness.

"Well, if you don't want me—come, captain," and they started for the garden.

Mistress Percy and Sir John looked at each other, and both knew that each understood.



X

FOR MY LADY'S HONOR

FOR quite a minute the man and girl looked at each other.

"You sent for me?" he questioned, after a pause.

Mistress Percy raised her eyes, steely now, and looked Sir John over casually.

"I only wanted to tell you," she remarked, in an even, polished tone, "that I think Dorothy Stanfield would make you a much better wife than I. She wants the position, you see."

"A mere excuse which means you don't," he blurted, angrily. "You wish, then, to be released from our compact?"

Already she had forced him on the defensive.

"Do you wish so much now to marry me?" she asked, with meaning.

"Certainly you must have good cause for your decision," he retorted.

Her eyes flashed a bit, but she controlled herself.

"I might say, 'because'—that's a woman's reason—and, besides, it would save your self-love a few wounds."

Sir John bowed. "Mistress Percy is strangely considerate. But do you remember you have promised to become my wife?"

The girl raised her hands protestingly.

"Don't! don't! Why remind me of my misfortunes? Remember, it was my father's plan."

"True," he admitted. "Your father's and mine. It was their plan first."

"Yes, Sir John," the eyebrows raised and the dainty nose tilted a bit more superciliously. "As I have remarked once before, you have always been a

very dutiful son." Her tone was one of polite encouragement to a little boy for a good deed. Then, as they faced each other, Gaston Dubarre, prepared for his going away, and wearing the coat left by Jacques Fourney, the spy, came along the garden-path from the lodge. He started to cross the lawn, but, seeing Sir John and Mistress Percy talking, paused at the bench to wait until they should move away. His eye caught the paper thrown aside by May Percy. He picked it up curiously. In a moment Dubarre was reading with eager haste.

Meanwhile, the lover who came out to demand had, instead, drifted ignominiously into helpless supplication.

"May, you know not what you are saying. I have been your lover since childhood, since those days when we played make-believe knight and lady in the park together, and I defended you

with my wooden sword, and killed a vicious dog for you. I don't remember when I haven't loved you. The love has grown with me. It is part of me. I couldn't rid myself of it if I would. Once we were friends and playmates. Then you liked me. I thought you loved me, and I spoke to your father. He was glad. You were willing. In the past few weeks has come a change. Why is it?"

Mistress Percy had taken a flower out of her belt and was pulling the petals from it in absent fashion. Now she yawned, looked up into her lover's abject face, then, with a shrug, cast the mutilated flower far from her. No words were needed with that answer. Sir John's teeth came together hard.

"What o'clock is it?" said Mistress Percy, yawning. "It must be almost noon - come," and she turned towards the castle.

The man sprang after her and caught her arm. "I won't be put off this way!" he exclaimed. "You have agreed to marry me. I have yours and your father's word. The betrothal has been publicly announced. I'm ready to perform my part of the contract, and I demand to be treated as your betrothed."

The girl released herself and faced him. The scant Percy patience was all gone now.

"Ah, Sir John demands!" she sneered. "Has Sir John always, in thought and word and deed, treated May Percy with the consideration and respect due his affianced wife? Let Sir John question himself closely on this point."

At that speech Wilmerding went white and weakened. Only dogged desire kept him pleading.

"If there was any lingering hesitation, or you did not expect to fulfil it, why did you promise?"



The dancing-master had finished a second perusal of the story about "French Percy." Now he slipped the paper in the breast-pocket of his coat, and, attracted by Sir John's loud speech, stood up to listen. He rose just in time to hear May Percy, losing an instant her steely calm, blurt, angrily:

"Because, loving no other, to gratify my father's heart's desire and save him from disappointment I would even marry you, John Wilmerding, though I did not love you."

Dubarre, standing beside the tree, smiled quickly and drew in a long breath. For an instant Sir John was stunned.

"I presume, then, that now you do love some one," he said at last, bitterly. That was a home thrust.

"Do you?" the girl sneered, and raised her chin very high, but her cheeks were flaming. The discarded lover saw



the red signals and instantly his fierce jealousy swept him into rage.

"Yes, and I came here to have a settlement with you about that very thing, and I will have it," he cried.

Mistress Percy stiffened.

"What do you mean?"

Rage-blinded, Sir John swept on. "And I'd have had it last night but for Thorncliffe—damn him!"

At the words Dubarre started suddenly, then stopped as quickly and gripped the back of the bench to hold himself behind the tree.

"Sir John Wilmerding," the girl cried, "my father shall—" But the man had swept too far past the point of reason to heed her warning.

"Yes, he shall know it, though 'twill break his proud heart. You'll beg in vain for an honest name then. Sir Henry will be proud—all will be proud of you—a Percy, with a low-born lover."

May Percy suddenly became white like death, then burning rage and shame made her face like fire. Her eyes opened wide, her nostrils dilated. She trembled and could not speak.

The blood was all gone from under Dubarre's nails, and he held to the bench to keep himself from starting forward. Now the girl came close to Sir John.

"Do you presume, sir," she almost whispered, so low and fierce the tone.

"I don't presume," he cried. "I know, for I saw you in his room last night—the room of that low-born French jig-stepper."

From the jig-stepper, standing just out of sight beside the bench, came a low gasp of agony. He let go his hold, then quickly slipped out of his coat, dropping the garment upon the bench, and laying his hat upon it. Next he rolled up the right sleeve of his shirt



above the elbow and stood upright again beside the tree, waiting—tensely waiting.

May Percy was sneering now. "A brave lover, truly, to doubt the honor of his affianced wife!" Then her anger blazed out once more beyond all bounds. "Now, I'll never marry you—no, never! never!"

The tense listener behind the tree gave a great, heaving sigh of joy. That last made it all worth while to him.

"You say well," sneered Sir John, in turn. "Doubtless you thought it a great joke to hide in his clock? I hope you confined your explorations of his apartment to the interior of the clock."

"Coward!" the girl cried, very white.

An avenging shadow flashed from the shrouding tree, like lightning. Straight as a bolt it went. In three leaps Dubarre had reached his victim. May Percy gave a startled little scream.



Wilmerding glanced that way. He turned in time to meet the Frenchman's blazing eyes — in time to catch the slashing, open-handed blow that sent the blood tingling to his cheeks.

"Quick! Liar! Traducer of women, fight quickly, that I may kill before the sun stops to shine for shame of you!"

The words, rushing from Dubarre's lips, came tumbling, almost telescoping one another.

Sir John sprang back, red, angry, and laid his hand on his sword. With accustomed gesture the Frenchman reached for his own, only to find himself unarmed. Then he cried again:

"Quick! Quick! Give me a sword, I say."

Wilmerding dropped his hand from the hilt with a sneering laugh. "Do you think I'd fight you—you renegade, you low-born French mountebank?"

Dubarre was calmer now. "From

knowing how, I shall dance the merrier at your burial, monsieur," he retorted.

"A sword, forsooth!" sneered Sir John. "I'll give you a rope, and the horse-boys shall lay it on your back."

The Frenchman sprang towards him. "Would you have me strangle you like a dog that is choked?"

The Englishman whipped out his weapon. "A step nearer and I'll kill you as one." Then, returning his sword to his scabbard, he changed his tone. "I forgot I was dealing with a servant. Here!" He drew some silver from his pocket and threw it towards Dubarre. "Take this, my man, and forget your spleen."

"For shame—for shame!" burst impassioned from May Percy's lips. "If you are a man, Sir John—an Englishman—give him a sword and fight."

For the first time Dubarre took apparent notice of her.

"Thank you, mademoiselle," he said.

Then as the three stood there, Captain Thorncliffe and Mistress Courtleigh appeared coming along the path from the garden, and they were but the vanguard for the others. The captain's war-trained senses quickly caught the signs of strife. He reached the bench just in time to hear Sir John exclaim, as he drew himself up, "I fight my equals only."

"What's this? What's this?" cried Thorncliffe. "Not a duel?"

Dubarre turned to him. "Will you, captain, lend me your sword?"

"To stick at my best friend? Not much, Sir Frenchman."

But still Dubarre pleaded: "I'll not disgrace it, captain."

May Percy and Ethel Courtleigh had drawn together and stood silent, fearful, towards the rear, holding each other's hands. The men seemed to have for-

gotten their presence entirely. Sir John was bent on further humiliating his low-born antagonist.

"French canaille touch the point of Captain Thorncliffe's sword only," he laughed.

Unheeding, the Frenchman continued to beg. "You, monsieur, are a soldier—a real soldier; I, too, have fought in the ranks. By the camaraderie of battle, I plead with you. On my knees I will beg you, lend me your sword for just one little instant, that I may avenge a black insult."

Thorncliffe guessed the quarrel and the cause, but loyalty to his friend left him no choice.

"'Tis useless, Dubarre," he said. "You cannot fight him."

The dancing-master turned back with stinging invective on his enemy. "What accident of birth permits you to refuse me, coward? The line of ancestors you

hide behind would be the first to scorn you. Are you afraid to die? Come, throw away your sword and fight without it. I'll promise not to kill you."

Stung at last to anger, Wilmerding sprang at him, then paused. Dubarre stood unmoved.

"Possibly monsieur is afraid of the disgrace of being beaten by a dancing-master. If so, I'll fight you secretly."

"You'll fight the stocks in public," roared Sir John.

"Coward!" muttered May Percy. And then, in a straggling rush the others came along the garden-path.

"Too base to retract a lie — too cowardly to fight! Mon Dieu—an English gentleman!" exclaimed Dubarre, in absolute disgust, as he turned to meet the rest. "Come—come all!" he cried. "Yes, come to see a Frenchman punish a craven."

"What's this?" exclaimed Sir Henry Percy. Sir John answered him.

"Your French pet's crazy. I hinted that he could not dance divinely."

The English chorus came in strong at that. "Don't mind him, Sir John." "Give him to the grooms!" "Let him cool his blood in the duck-pond!" "Match your man 'gainst him single-sticks. 'Twould be great sport!"

The balked one was in despair. "If I were a gentleman!" he muttered.

Wilmerding heard.

"Then I'd kill you like one. I fight my peers."

A look of supreme resolve sprang in Dubarre's eyes.

"Monsieur fights his peers!" The tone rang clamorous joy. With a panther-like spring the Frenchman was beside Captain Thorncliffe. An instant, and he had wrenched out the captain's sword and was back before Sir John.

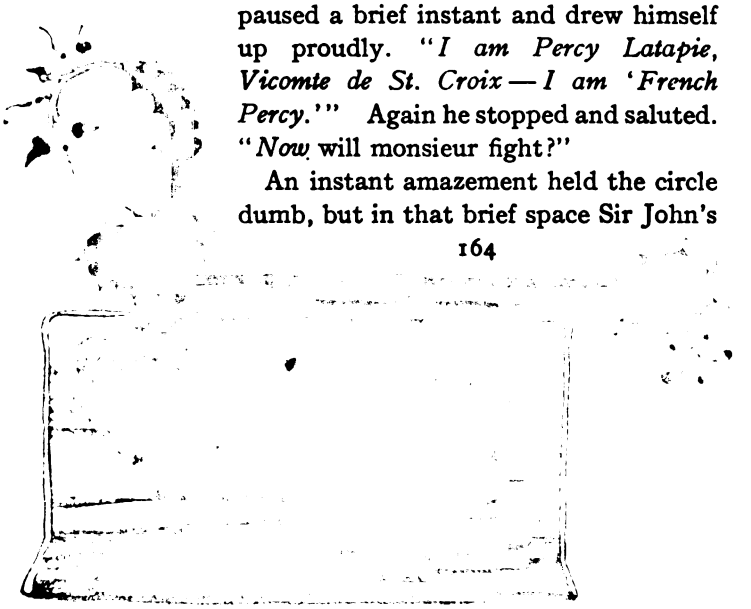


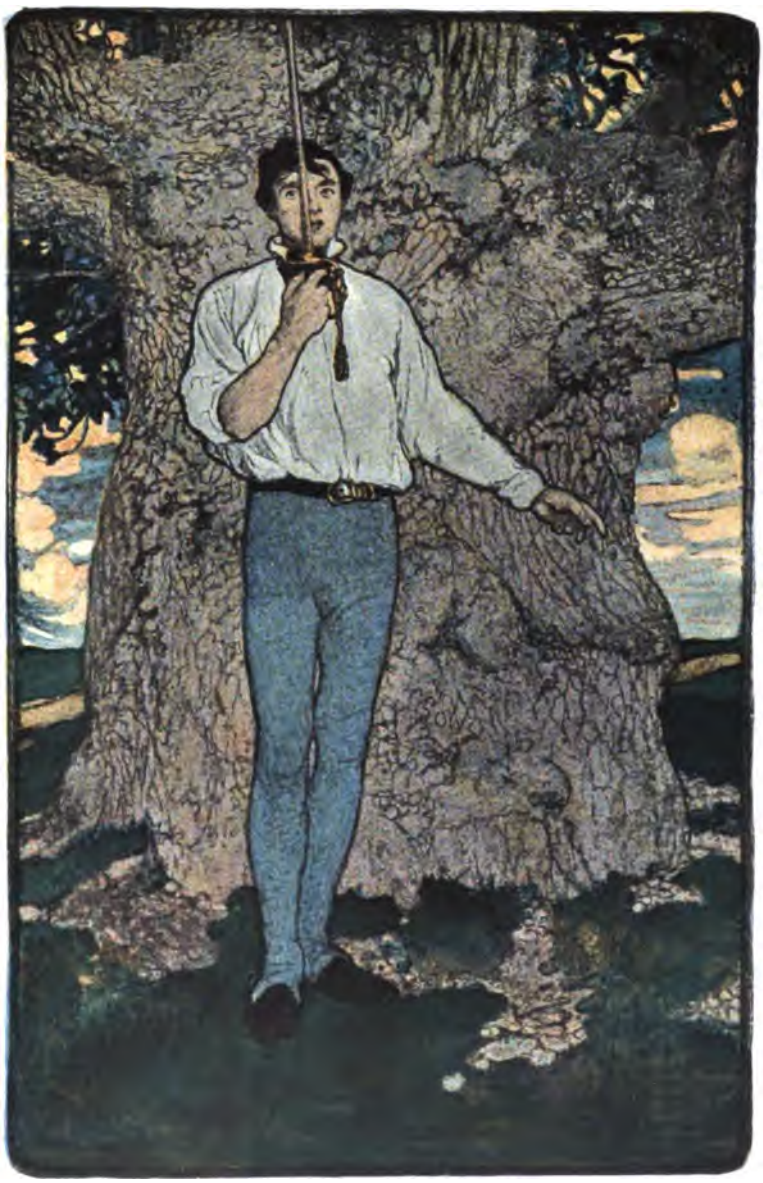
The rest looked on, amazed. The man had moved almost too quick for wits to know, let alone hands to stop him. Now he saluted his enemy. It was the sword salute of a French officer.

"An English gentleman must fight when his peer demands it," cried the dancing-master.

In laughing delight he continued: "Monsieur has asked the hand of a Percy in marriage. The Percys are anybody's peers. Only last night myself and these gentlemen here heard monsieur wish that he might have 'French Percy' at his sword-point. Monsieur shall have that wish." He paused a brief instant and drew himself up proudly. "*I am Percy Latapie, Vicomte de St. Croix — I am 'French Percy.'*" Again he stopped and saluted. "*Now* will monsieur fight?"

An instant amazement held the circle dumb, but in that brief space Sir John's





"IT WAS THE SWORD SALUTE OF A FRENCH OFFICER"



sword was out. Now he rushed wildly, strong in the might of his double cause for hate. Deftly the Frenchman parried and sprang back.

"Hold, monsieur—hold!" he cried.

Wilmerding checked, snarling, "Have you got enough so soon?"

Dubarre laughed in his face.

"I wish to kill honorably, not murder, monsieur," he said. "If Sir John will but remove his coat and scabbard, he will not be encumbered"—with his old dancing-master grace he bowed—"then we can resume, and I promise monsieur not to be the one to cry 'hold' again."

Sir John looked his astonishment.

"You are a gentleman," he blurted, at last, and turned to remove his coat.

Smiling, the other awaited him. A great change had come over this Frenchman. The clash of steel had quite transformed him. It was not the humble dancing-master, with his profound

grace, nor yet the eager, impetuous fire-eater Dubarre; but a new man—the courtly, daring, utterly reckless "French Percy," who stood easy and graceful, poised for the attack. Still smiling, he watched Sir John's preparation, and he did not look at May Percy at all.

On Sir Henry Percy's quick command the other girls had hurried for the house, but Mistress Percy merely shook her head, and, after one look, the father dared not order her to go. Silent and white she stood, watching the smiling man who had so proudly, so gladly spoken his own death-warrant for her honor. She knew 'twere best for him to die on Sir John Wilmerding's sword, for, if he lived and Sir John fell, naught but a spy's death awaited him.

There had never been a thought of stopping the duel. The Englishman's bull-dog hate and courage would not have permitted that. Only, the watch-

ing men hoped and prayed that their countryman might win.

And now Sir John was ready. Strong, bulky, his face blood-red from hate, he advanced, gripping his sword. Slender and alert, his smiling antagonist awaited him, the impersonation of nervous force. They saluted.

"Begin," said Captain Thorncliffe

With a rush Wilmerding came forward. The Frenchman gave. Back and still farther back he was pressed, but, like a swallow, darting in and out, this way and that, he kept the heavy Englishman at bay. His sword seemed rather to anticipate than meet Wilmerding's thrusts. He had no time to thrust himself. And still Sir John pressed in. Dubarre was parrying, leaping, dodging—here, there, everywhere—and all the while laughing with the eager abandon of a boy.

The bench beside the tree was Sir

John's objective point. Slowly, carefully, he forced Dubarre towards it. Hemmed in against that bench, his legs could not save him. Sir John must win. The Frenchman seemed to fall into the trap. Now he was scant three feet from the bench. Anxious, breathless, the crowd bent forward, waiting for English victory. Alone, an alien was about to die.

"The bench—Gaston! The bench!" The warning cry burst from May Percy's lips without her knowing. Wilmerding heard it, and, baffled, thrust the harder. Dubarre heard it, too.

"Thanks, mademoiselle," he cried, gayly, and between two quick parries leaped backward upon the bench.

"The jumping-jack tricks help, monsieur," he laughed.

Wilmerding was too terribly in earnest to talk. With tigerish savagery he still pressed in. His sword, hate-aimed,

was as a white streak of mirror-flashed sunlight playing too fast for eye to follow about his victim. His anger had grown to murder-lust now. And all the while, poised lightly on his unstable foothold, the Frenchman joked and played with death. A dozen times he seemed touched. Half a score more, his fate on a hostile sword-point was scarce an inch away, but after each good thrust he never failed to cry, "Well done, Monsieur Anglais!" then laugh at his opponent.

Half a dozen Englishmen prayed that each thrust might end it. Only a girl, white, fascinated, was watching one face smiling amid a flashing halo of sword-blades and murmuring over and over to herself, "God help him—God help him!"

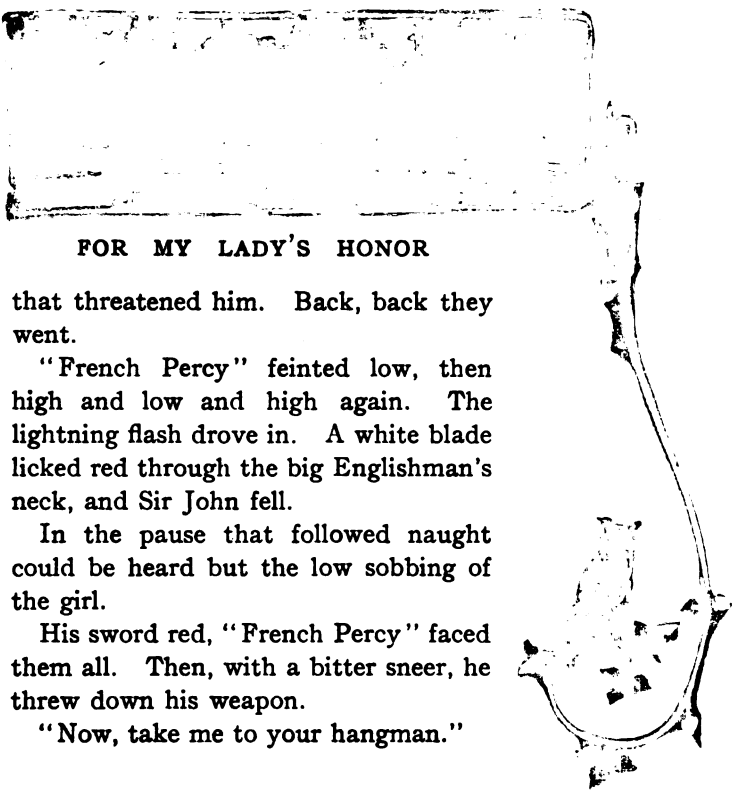
With a last rush, Sir John came on. Dubarre sprang lightly over the back of the bench to the ground, and then they were fighting across a barrier.



"Monsieur is so impetuous," protested the laughing Frenchman.

For reply the other rushed after him around the bench. And now the Frenchman was quartering back to the crowd again. He twisted and turned so as to face them, and then, for the first time, over Wilmerding's shoulder Dubarre saw May Percy's face. That glance changed everything.

"Pardon, pardon—I did not think," he cried, as though to no one, but one did understand. Then "French Percy" —not Dubarre—took up the fight. He stopped. The blades slipped past until the hilts kissed, and Sir John gave back. And now, straight through the midst of his friends, "French Percy" drove the Englishman. The avenger's sword was as lightning, fearful and appalling, that would not be denied. He had ceased to laugh. Helpless, Sir John gave, wincing, from a million points



that threatened him. Back, back they went.

"French Percy" feinted low, then high and low and high again. The lightning flash drove in. A white blade licked red through the big Englishman's neck, and Sir John fell.

In the pause that followed naught could be heard but the low sobbing of the girl.

His sword red, "French Percy" faced them all. Then, with a bitter sneer, he threw down his weapon.

"Now, take me to your hangman."

XI

MINE IMAGINATIVE HOST

FOR three hours Wellington's spy and his assistant had remained shut up in a room of the White Falcon Inn. Jacques Fourney still paced angrily across from wall to wall, while Jean, the weaker of the two, utterly dejected, had thrown himself down on the floor in one corner. From there he now cursed bitterly at the crop-eared fool of an innkeeper, and then bemoaned his own fate.

Fourney stopped in his hurried walk to berate his cursing comrade.

"For the love of Heaven, Jean, be quiet, and let us make some plan for getting out."

"Get out?" ejaculated Jean. "How



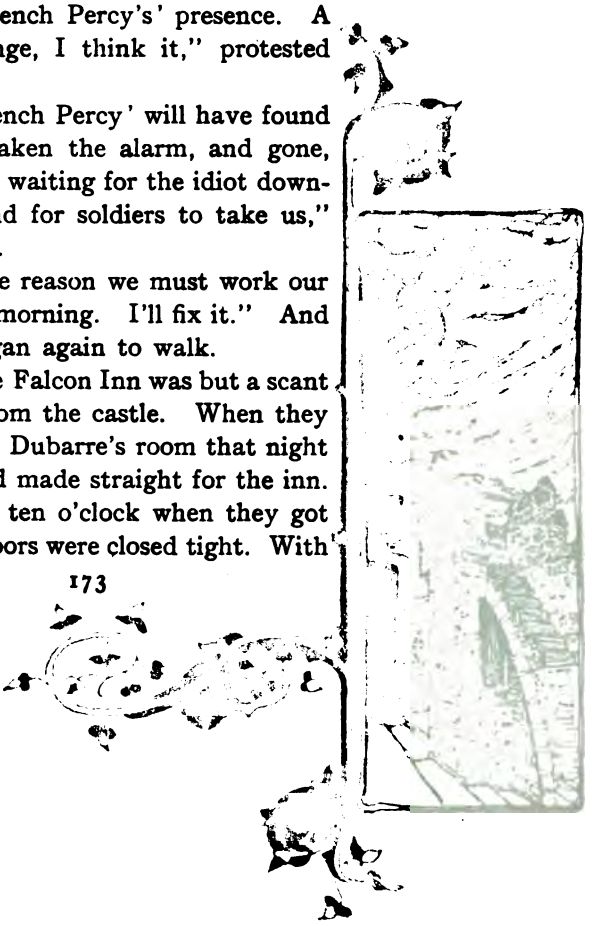
in God's world can we get out of this hell's-hole he's tricked us into? If you had not left your pass in that coat the Frenchman's fool wore off, we had not been stopped."

"We brought the signet-ring, clear proof of 'French Percy's' presence. A good exchange, I think it," protested Fourney.

"But 'French Percy' will have found that pass, taken the alarm, and gone, while we are waiting for the idiot downstairs to send for soldiers to take us," Jean argued.

"The more reason we must work our way out by morning. I'll fix it." And Fourney began again to walk.

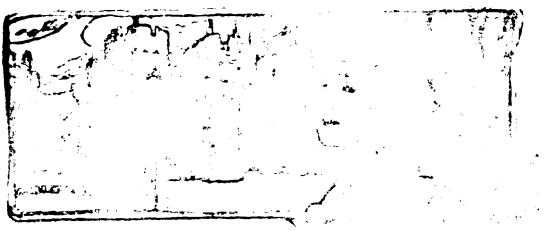
The White Falcon Inn was but a scant five miles from the castle. When they slipped from Dubarre's room that night the spies had made straight for the inn. It was after ten o'clock when they got there, and doors were closed tight. With



difficulty they aroused the place, and the sleepy landlord stood aghast at two strange wayfarers who wanted horses at that time of night. They were dirty and torn and scratched from walking through the muddy fields. Ill-looking customers, any one would have called them. Then "mine host" caught sight of pistols ill concealed, and that decided him.

"Highwaymen who have lost their mounts," he thought. No, they could not have horses. He kept none for hire there, he said. Fourney begged, pleaded, insisted, all in vain. It was the king's business they were on, he urged. The loyal innkeeper pursed up his lips and asked for proofs. Fourney could show nothing. His only credentials were in the coat left at the castle.

Mine host became in turn obstinate, sulky, suspicious. At last, angry, the chief spy drew a pistol, promising great



MINE IMAGINATIVE HOST

rewards, but threatening dire vengeance if the horses were not forthcoming. Then mine host seemed to yield, and straightway invited them into the house to drink a bottle of wine, while the grumbling hostler stumbled sleepily out to prepare horses for the "noble gentlemen." Mine host lured the unsuspecting travellers into an up-stairs room while he went for the wine. He was gone so long that Fourney started after him, only to find the oak door barred on the outside. Thus were the spies trapped. In the morning mine host, as he informed them through the door, would send for the soldiers "to seize and hang the highwaymen."

The soldiers were fifteen miles away. They would not reach the inn perhaps for thirty hours. By that time "French Percy" might have escaped. It behooved the blood-seekers to hurry.

Fourney stopped suddenly in his hurried walk about the room.

"Jean, I have it!" he exclaimed, and darted to the fireplace.

The prison evidently had been once a chamber for important guests. Though now dismantled of fine furniture, its size and the big open fireplace showed the quality.

"Can you make it?" asked Jean.

Fourney, the small one, shook his head. "I'll try," and without more ado he thrust his head up into the black hole.

Ten minutes later a slight, soot-begrimed figure crept cautiously along the ridge-pole of the White Falcon. The roof sloped down to a low kitchen. Carefully Fourney slipped over the roof down that way. His stockinged feet made no noise on the old shingles. Soon he had reached the lowest spot. It was a short eight-foot drop to the soft grass

below. The kitchen window stood invitingly open. Through it the spy crawled quickly. Then, with all the daring and skill of his calling, he snaked through the inn towards the up-stairs room, where his assistant was still confined.

Secure in his belief that the highwaymen could not break through barred windows and oaken doors, mine host had gone to sleep. The country lout he left to watch the prisoners' door snored loud enough to drown the slight noise made by Fourney raising the bar from place. Now the comrades were reunited. They lifted the stable key from the sleeping hostler and started down-stairs. Then some grim humor made Fourney pause.

"Inside," he whispered. Returning, the spies picked up the sleeping man carefully, and bore him within the room. He only moaned a bit in his slumber.

When the door was safely barred again, they crept down through the house and out of the kitchen window. Not a soul had been disturbed. A number of horses stood within the stable. They picked the two best and led them out just as the moon was setting.

"We'll reach the garrison about daybreak," said Fourney, as they started.

On through the black night the pair rode, hard as horses could drive, for this was the king's business. Five, seven, ten, twelve miles of country road were passed over. The horses had begun to flag now, but under the magic of the whip the trees and fields went by almost as fast as at first. Then the brown road unwound before them for a straight last dash. Madly they urged on the race. The day was almost breaking.

In that gray, dead hour of the early dawn a yawning sentry shifted his

musket and wondered "where was that relief." Then horses' hoofs in wild race pounded along the country road. Alert, the sentry sprang to the charge.

"Halt!" The sudden challenge rang out clear.

"'French Percy's' ours," spoke Fourney to Jean.

"Halt, there!" sounded the second fierce command.

"All right; we surrender," answered Fourney.

As he rode forward his tired horse stumbled and the pistol in his holster went off accidentally.



"ENTER!" cri
came a knoc
There was the
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bowed deeply. "A
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come to his own.



held to his oath and lived in that room, keeping always a weather-eye open for the Roundhead invasion. And there one morning they found him dead. And so they called it the Waiting-Chamber. At any rate, the room, with its barred, single stained-glass window, its dark furnishing and sombre hangings, well fitted the legend. It was in this Waiting-Chamber that a later generation of Percys had confined this second conqueror, who had come to his own from "over the water."

Sir Henry Percy stood in the middle of the floor, embarrassed. "I've come to see you," he said, at last.

His cousin smiled. "To lead me forth to the hangman? Truly, I'm honored." More embarrassed than ever, the blunt old squire held out his hand.

"No, to thank you for your noble, though misguided, defence of my daughter May. They've told me of it."



It was the Frenchman's turn to be surprised.

"Misguided!" he cried, seizing his cousin's hand. "Why, sir, he put a breath of insult upon an angel."

"Tut! tut! my boy," answered Sir Henry, hastily. "'Twas but a lovers' quarrel, and, since no great harm came of it, I can the more rejoice, for it showed you can't hurt the old stock. You can't ruin a Percy, even if you make him a Frenchman. That's why I am glad." And he slapped the dancing-master on the shoulder right heartily.

St. Croix was not so enthusiastic. "Harm enough for me," he said. "Sir John dead, I am to be hanged."

The squire only laughed delightedly. "No, no!" he cried. "Your sword passed through the fleshy part of his neck. The hilt struck him in the face and knocked him senseless. Zounds, man, you did thrust hard! But now

John is not much the worse and able to be about with his neck bound up and a splitting head. And, as for me"—he paused to poke Dubarre in the ribs slyly—"I've come to get you out of this."

To hold a chance for life before a man condemned to certain death is dangerous. Even the hardened "French Percy" gave a great gasp of joy.

"Me, free! Ah, monsieur—cousin—I do not understand," he cried.

Sir Henry was himself affected. "It means," he blurted, huskily, "I could not let so plucky a Percy hang. Even if he is part Frenchman by birth, he must be a Percy true to run such risks to see his family home. And Captain Thorncliffe set the other story straight."

Then the old squire went on to tell how Captain Thorncliffe had explained that May's woman-wit saw through the disguise of her cousin; that she came to

warn him, and was near to being caught, and, only to save him, had hidden in the clock.

"It must have been sport for you," roared Sir Henry, finishing.

"It was," answered his French relative, dryly. Then he came back to the main subject. "But, Cousin Henry, how am I to get away?"

"Trust me, my boy," laughed the squire. "We are guarding the door by turns—Thorncliffe, John, and I. I am on from nine to ten o'clock to-night. The soldiers who have been sent for cannot reach here before midnight. On my watch, I will leave the bar up. About half-past the hour you will hear me sing. Then slip out. Strike me, but not too hard, and I'll fall senseless and so remain for half an hour."

The eyes of the Vicomte de St. Croix sparkled. At the chance for life he was

again "French Percy," daring and reckless.

"Can I procure a horse?" he asked, eagerly.

Sir Henry nodded. "My own pet hunter will be waiting near the lodge gate, a long cloak on the saddle, pistols and a dagger in the holsters. Then"—he held out his hand—"run, my boy. God bless you!—you're a Percy, every inch of you." The squire's voice was suspiciously husky, and he blew his nose hard. He turned and had almost reached the door when the young nobleman called him.

"But, cousin, what of mademoiselle—my cousin May?"

Sir Henry scratched his head in perplexity, then his face brightened.

"Why, if you leave an address, she shall write you an invitation to the wedding."

"But could I not see her, thank her,



say farewell?" begged St. Croix, his soul in his words.

The other shook his head. "Not easily, but I can take a message of farewell."

"Not farewell, but au revoir," answered the French cousin, smiling. Mistress Percy's father was more puzzled than ever.

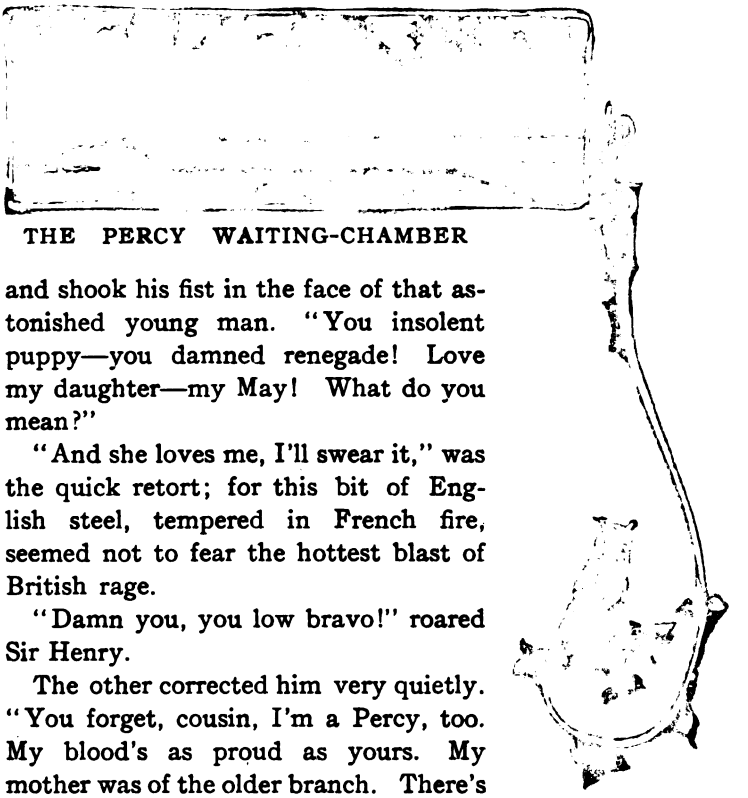
"What?" he asked.

The prisoner drew himself up and spoke very slowly.

"A St. Croix would reunite the Percys, cousin." And his meaning was very clear.

For a full minute Sir Henry looked only blank. Then gradually the astounding proposition sifted through into his consciousness. An offer of marriage from a Frenchman! His honest English heart blazed fierce anger at the insult.

Furiously he strode up to St. Croix



THE PERCY WAITING-CHAMBER

and shook his fist in the face of that astonished young man. "You insolent puppy—you damned renegade! Love my daughter—my May! What do you mean?"

"And she loves me, I'll swear it," was the quick retort; for this bit of English steel, tempered in French fire, seemed not to fear the hottest blast of British rage.

"Damn you, you low bravo!" roared Sir Henry.

The other corrected him very quietly. "You forget, cousin, I'm a Percy, too. My blood's as proud as yours. My mother was of the older branch. There's no taint in the St. Croix line."

Sir Henry tried vainly to emulate his calmness.

"By God eternal! I'm glad you told me," he blurted; then, rage-swept, he continued, furiously: "Do you think I'd let her marry you, a traitor outcast, an

enemy to the king — you, who have English blood on your hands — you, a spy, a thief, who stole over here from France, plotting to rob me of my dearest treasure? But you'll never get her, for you'll be dead before she's married."

"Ay, that I will before she marries Wilmerding," interrupted St. Croix, angrily.

Sir Henry had at last secured reasonable calmness.

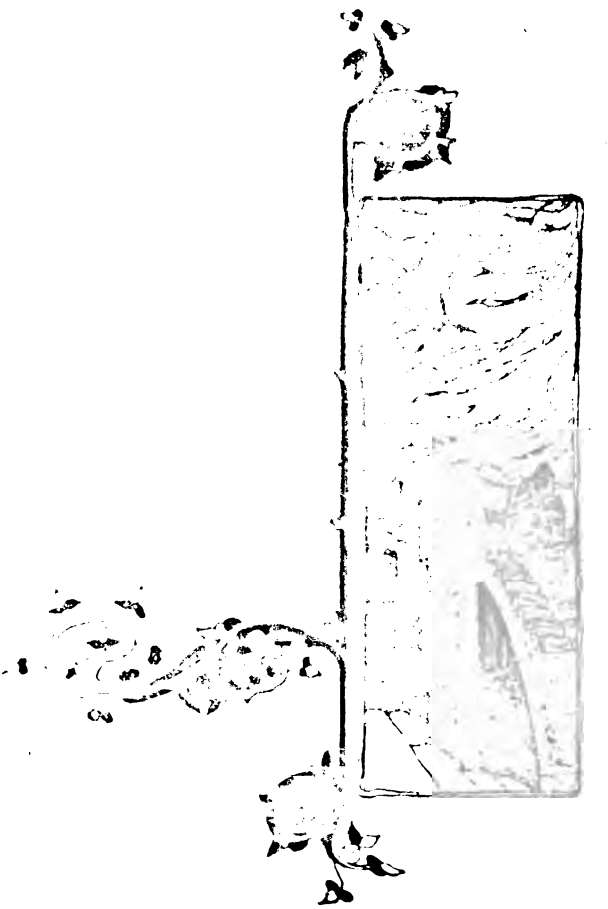
"Right you are," he sneered. "I'll have my friend the bishop over from Sir Harvey Johnston's to-morrow. Hanged you'll be, and we'll marry her to her true lover the day after."

And with that parting shot the raging squire pounded on the door to be let out.

Utterly dejected, St. Croix threw himself in the only chair the Waiting-Chamber afforded. Without, he could hear



the sound of the heavy bar falling into place and the loud voice of Sir Henry admonishing Captain Thorncliffe to "watch that damned cut-throat Frenchman close."



XIII

THE PRICE OF A MAN

CAST into uttermost despair, St. Croix did not hear a modest knock upon his prison door. Again the knock was repeated, and the Frenchman looked up.

"Well, do you think I'm out?" he called, impatiently. Then the bar was raised, the door opened slightly, and Captain Thorncliffe's head appeared.

"May I come in, Colonel Latapie?"

"Have I any choice, monsieur?" the prisoner retorted, sarcastically. The Englishman's face hardened.

"Certainly I would not intrude if possible to avoid it, sir," he said, stiffly.

Instantly, stung at his rudeness to the man who, so far as he could honorably, had befriended him, the generous Frenchman sprang to his feet.

"Pardon, monsieur — pardon," he cried. "A soldier should always be glad to welcome a brother soldier. It felicitates me to greet Captain Thorncliffe."

Now the captain entered smiling.

"I feel I bring my welcome with me," he said, "as I am but the courier for your dinner. You must pardon the delay, Colonel Latapie, but the events of the morning quite drove the thought of eating from our minds."

St. Croix bowed. "I hope I've not caused you inconvenience, captain."

The Englishman smiled. "Do you remember a misty dawn at a certain outpost in the Spanish Hills, colonel, and how a returned soldier of the 86th Foot left the camp?"

"And you were that lieutenant!" exclaimed St. Croix, joyfully.

Then, in the eloquent silence that followed, Frenchman and Englishman, victor and defeated in that old outpost duel, with hands tight-clasped, looked into each other's eyes.

"I always hoped he was but slightly hurt—the man who told them not to fire," said the Frenchman at last.

"And ever since that morning I've wished to meet again the coolest fighter I ever saw," replied the generous Englishman — "the man who held my life and let me go with but a trifling wound. I owe you something." Then, being English, he swallowed all his feelings to blurt out suddenly, "Where are those girls?"

"Girls!" exclaimed St. Croix, trying hard to keep the joy out of his voice.

"Why, yes, your cousin and Mistress Courtleigh. They've prepared your din-

ner with their own hands, and have been waiting an hour till Sir Henry should get out of the way to bring it to you."

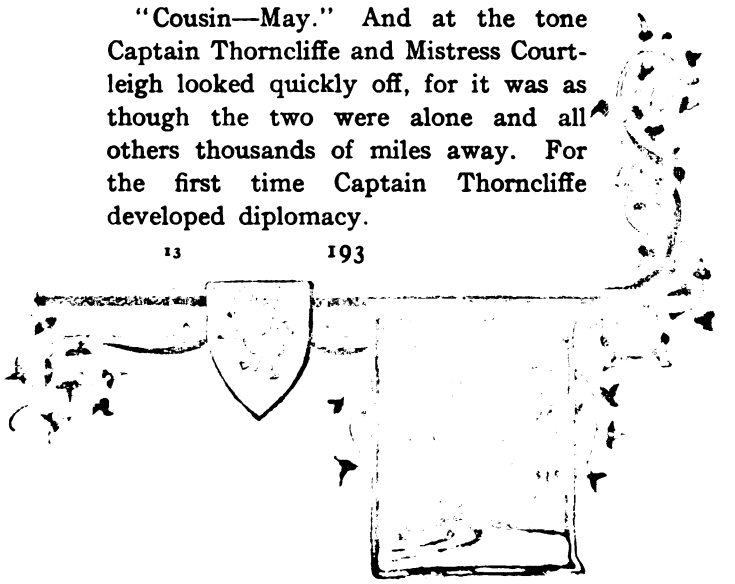
Even as the captain spoke, May Percy and Mistress Courtleigh appeared at the door, carrying a basket large enough to hold dinner for half a company.

"May we come in, captain?" asked Mistress Courtleigh, gayly. The prisoner sprang towards them. May Percy let go one half the basket and stood looking at St. Croix.

"Mademoiselle," he began.

"Cousin, if you please," she corrected him, and tried to look archness from misty eyes.

"Cousin—May." And at the tone Captain Thorncliffe and Mistress Courtleigh looked quickly off, for it was as though the two were alone and all others thousands of miles away. For the first time Captain Thorncliffe developed diplomacy.



"Come, come, Mistress Courtleigh," he cried, "it's against all prison rules for more than one visitor to be in this room at a time. I must ask you to step outside."

"What dreadful, dreadful rules, captain!" answered the girl, in mock rebellion, as, dropping her basket, she hurried for the door.

"They are necessary with desperate cut-throats," replied the captain, stiffly, bowing her out. Then he turned, all military, to Mistress Percy. "If you need me," he said, "or the prisoner becomes violent, call."

A moment more and the pair within the room heard the bar without fall into place. Quickly May Percy turned with shy, sweet impulsiveness to St. Croix, holding out both her hands "Now—now I can thank you, cousin."

He seized her hands and bent over to kiss them fervidly.

"Ah, mademoiselle—cousin—" and his voice shook. "You always so overpay a service." He was standing close beside her, still holding her hands.

"But your life!" she cried. "You risked that for me! Even now, because of me, you stand in the shadow of an outrageous death. Oh!" She drew her hands away from him and began to walk up and down the room hurriedly. "I can't think of it! I must get you out some way. It's for that I am here—to help you back to France, to those you love and who love you and appreciate you."

"Mademoiselle." At his tone she paused, facing him. St. Croix came very close to her before he spoke, slowly, meaningly.

"If all who love me are in France—then, indeed, it was a useless throw."

She tried to get away from the love in his eyes, and could not. Then a great

heart-leap of joy sent crimson rushing to her cheeks; her bosom rose and fell quickly, her eyes softened.

"You do—you mean—" she murmured.

St. Croix only took her in his arms and held her close, so close that she could just hear his half-whisper—"That gallows—death—hereafter—are as nothing if le bon Dieu but speak his message of perfect love through you, mademoiselle."

Once she looked up and her eyes invited him. Slowly his head bent down.

"My life for this," he murmured, and their lips met. In a moment he raised his head. "And, oh, how cheap!" said St. Croix.

"Gaston! Gaston!" May Percy's arms were about his neck, and she was kissing him convulsively between little sobs and murmurings of love.

A hurried knocking at the door dropped them from heaven to earth

again. The lovers sprang apart. May Percy rushed to the table. Dubarre brought the basket, and between them they began setting out the lunch. The bar without was raised, the door shot open, and Mistress Courtleigh, her eyes dancing from excitement, rushed into the room. She came to wreck the lovers' paradise — to tell them that their time was up, for Sir John Wilmerding would come on guard in five minutes.

"Have you shown him what you came for, May?" she asked; and then, seeing the girl smiling, trembling, blushing, Mistress Courtleigh understood that the reason for their coming among other things had been forgotten.

"Quick!" she commanded, and May Percy ran to the right-hand wall. St. Croix sprang after. Turning her back sympathetically, Mistress Courtleigh made a great ado at setting out the

dishes upon the table. May Percy was fumbling at a panel in the wall.

"What is it?" asked St. Croix, eagerly.

"A secret way!" she exclaimed. "Oh —where's that spring? I've known it since a child. Oh, that catch!" She was fumbling all over the panel excitedly.

"Quick! quick!" cried Mistress Courtleigh from the table as there came a warning knock at the door.

"Does Captain Thorncliffe know?" questioned St. Croix.

"No, but at heart he'll be glad. Oh, here it is!" Mistress Percy cried out, joyfully, as she touched a spring and a small door slid back.

"It's dark enough," smiled her lover, sniffing at the dank smell that came out through the narrow patch of blackness.

"Yes, and small," continued May Percy. "Part of the way you must crawl. I've been through. It comes

out at a big oak near the little lodge—our lodge, you know."

St. Croix nodded.

"Do hurry!" cried Ethel Courtleigh, interrupting, for the door rattled a second warning of danger near at hand.

May Percy took up her explanation, speaking very fast. "Wait until you hear me talking to my father outside the door at nine o'clock—then try it. I'll have my mare Nellie tied behind the lodge. Then—then—" Her arms stole about his neck, a look and one word ended it—"Sweetheart."

He held her to him, and straightway they seemed to forget all else. Now he spoke low:

"Do you think, dear, I can touch heaven and lose it? There must be two horses. Nellie could not carry us both. We'll meet the ship at midnight—the priest an hour before."



"But, Gaston," she murmured, protestingly.

He kissed her hair and her eyes before he spoke.

"Together, sweetheart, from this time forward. Here or there?"

"There! there!" she cried, impulsively.

"Then in the hut at nine," and, as though in answer to his words, a shadow —the shadow of Sir John Wilmerding— crossed the stained-glass window. Within the room they could hear Captain Thorncliffe ask:

"What brought you out so soon, Jack?" And Wilmerding's reply:

"I feared that damned Frenchman might escape, Hal. And I've decided to put my servant on guard here and stay in the room with him myself. It's best to take no chances."

"You must go at once," whispered May Percy. "Hide in the passage. The panel can be latched from within."

Then Sir John, without, cried, alarmed, "Why, Hal, you've left the door open!"

"Au revoir, sweetheart! Nine o'clock," and with a hasty-snatched kiss, St. Croix prepared to step within the passage.

May Percy moved over to the big prison-door. Standing there beside Mistress Courtleigh, she watched St. Croix. He was watching her.

Suddenly, without slightest warning, the big door opened, and Sir John Wilmerding stepped quickly in. One glance showed all. Hate gave him wit. Springing to May Percy's side, he seized the girl and whipped out his short hunting-knife. Raising it, he cried:

"Come back, you damned spy, or I stab her!"



XIV

A WIDE-AWAKE GOVERNMENT

CAREFULLY St. Croix stepped back into the room.

"No! No! Go on, Gaston!" exclaimed Mistress Percy, hysterically. But, instead, he closed the panel after him with elaborate attention, then turned and bowed deeply to Sir John.

"Monsieur has the advantage," sneered the Frenchman, "for he fights with weapons which are impossible for a gentleman to use." And saying this, the man thus brought suddenly back to face a degrading death shrugged his shoulders and strolled to the window, where he stood drumming his fingers on the sill and straining his eyes against a

murky outside through blue-stained glass.

Sir John released the girl and put up his knife.

"I would thank Mistress Percy," he said, "for her valuable assistance in preventing the escape of so desperate a ruffian. But your father would like to see you. Will you go to him?"

He might have been a reptile, the girl drew back from him with such loathing, wiping her arm hard, as though his mere touch had defiled it. Without even a look for reply, she walked over and leaned against the mantel, a beautiful picture of collapsed defeat.

"As you will," sniffed Sir John, and, jaunty now in spite of his bandaged throat and generally dilapidated appearance, he strode over to the panel to block up the only remaining way of escape.

But try as he might, the Englishman could not find the secret spring. All

over the panel he fumbled, poking this way and that at every suspicious knob and smooth place, but still the secret point eluded his hardest efforts. From the window St. Croix watched him.

To the Frenchman, defeated now at every turn, with his last card of luck played out, it was the time for utter despair. Dejectedly he turned from Sir John and started towards the chair beside the table near the centre of the room. As he moved he thrust one hand carelessly into the pocket of his coat—that coat once worn by Jacques Fourney, the spy.

May Percy, watching his face as only a loving woman watches, caught the sudden lightning look of joy that flashed upon it and was as quickly gone. With his eyes he told her to come to him, and, understanding, she began to glide slowly, cautiously towards the chair.

Sir John, fumbling at the panel, saw



none of the by-play. The Frenchman was directly behind him now, still moving towards the chair.

"I hope his wound does not trouble monsieur extremely," ventured St. Croix over his right shoulder as he edged away. By this time the girl was close to him.

"Ah, mademoiselle," he exclaimed, aloud, "you have dropped your handkerchief—permit me." Then, as their hands met over the dainty bit of lace, the girl felt her fingers pressed with sudden ardor.

"Trust me," he whispered low, and in a moment was away, bowing with mere politeness. Still, Sir John, angry at being baffled, struggled desperately with the panel. Now the Frenchman was turned that way.

"Yes," he said. "I tried only to disarm monsieur, but he was violent, and," with his inimitable shrug, "I was forced to wound him slightly." The

prisoner's tone expressed just a passing regret at having been compelled to perform a small, disagreeable duty.

"Lying comes easy to Frenchmen," blurted Sir John, at the panel.

"And one must lie to catch a liar," retorted the other; "but—eh bien! as the French say — I'm glad the little comedy is played out."

The Englishman looked surprised.

"Comedy played out?" he sneered, with British candor. "Not till you're hanged."

"I spoke of this comedy," said Dubarre, smiling with quiet amusement, sure in the consciousness of something yet to come.

Sir John turned towards him, puzzled now.

"I don't see that you have cause for laughter."

"Sir John does not see everything," answered the old dancing-master, gen-

tly, "but it is just as I have said." He unbuttoned his coat, took from the inside pocket the newspaper containing the story about "French Percy," and held it towards Sir John.

"Will monsieur read? Possibly this may explain many things."

Wilmerding came over quickly to take the paper. He stood beside the table on the Frenchman's right to read it. May Percy, eager, anxious, had stolen to his other side. As Sir John read, her eyes questioned her lover's, but his quick smile of encouragement told her only to be brave and wait.

Sir John looked up from his reading.

"Good! Good!" he cried. "We English can always fool you dull French spies. The government is awake."

"And, as usual, when awake it played the fool," broke in the Frenchman, bitterly. "This, now—" he took the paper from Sir John. "'It is safe to

wager that "French Percy" will fail in this, his last desperate undertaking, or, if he should get to the castle, will certainly be captured. The place is now being watched.'" The reader cast the paper down angrily. "Fools! Idiots! That's what spoiled it."

"Spoiled it?" questioned Sir John.

"Yes," blurted Dubarre, angry now clear through—"spoiled it, I said. Send a man down here to watch, then publish such stuff."

"What's this? What do you mean?" interrupted the slower Englishman, while even Mistress Percy began to show some signs of uneasiness.

"Mean?" ejaculated Dubarre. "I mean that while I fooled with a country bumpkin over his pastoral love affair, because of this paper 'French Percy' slipped through my fingers."

Sir John fell back to gaze at him in angry, blank amazement. "'French

Percy' gone!" he blustered. "All know you are the renegade himself."

The other had recovered his temper by this time. Now he shrugged his shoulders.

"Only when it pleased me. I'm no more 'French Percy' than I am Gaston Dubarre." And with his old mocking laugh he looked at the two astounded faces before him. May Percy fell away from him with a little cry of horror.

"Who? What?" was all Sir John could mutter, stupidly.

The self-confessed stranger drew himself up and bowed to them both deeply. "Jacques Fourney, the government's private emissary, at your service," he said.

"Jacques Fourney! Wellington's spy? Stuff!" cried Sir John.

Mistress Percy looked for a moment at the Frenchman, fright and amazement in her eyes, then sank into the

chair and buried her face in her arms upon the table. The acknowledged spy appeared nettled. He drew a small case out of his coat-pocket and extracted therefrom a bit of oiled paper, which he spread out and offered to the Englishman.

"Read this, sir, and change your mind." Then as Sir John glanced at it he added, aloud, "Mistress Percy might like to hear."

The girl who had rested in the man's arms so few minutes before heard Sir John read of her lover:

"This is to certify that the bearer, Jacques Fourney, is a faithful, loyal, and highly efficient officer in the British service. All soldiers and loyal subjects to whom he may appeal are hereby commanded to do everything in their power to aid him in whatever way he may desire, especially in the matter of the capture of the notorious outlaw and spy 'French Percy.' This order is to be considered a pass through all lines, and is to serve as a requisition in case anything is

needed by the bearer. All soldiers will see that it is duly honored. It will be shown only in case of grave necessity.

"WELLINGTON,
"General Commanding."

* * * * *

Up and down, back and forth before the door of the Waiting-Chamber paced Captain Thorncliffe and Sir Henry Percy, laboring in earnest argument.

"You, Captain Thorncliffe, you have fought the French, you have bled for England; yet you give such counsel—I cannot understand it."

Captain Thorncliffe dropped his hand with light touch on the old baronet's arm before replying, seriously. "And believe me, Sir Henry, that is the very reason I advise you to permit his escape. The fighters are not the haters, Sir Henry."

The older one shook off the restraining hand angrily.

"But," he protested, "this man



humbled you and the British arms in outrageous fashion. Do you forget the stealing of the headquarters papers that early morning in the Spanish pass?"

On the instant flashed back the soldier's question. "When came it the part of an English gentleman to bear malice against a gallant enemy?"

Sir Henry's face grew hard at the rebuke. His hands began to clinch and unclinch rapidly. He was working fast into a characteristic rage.

"Your duty, Captain Thorncliffe—"

"Will be in no wise evaded by letting this man go," broke in the soldier.

"He is counted one of the dangerous men in the French army."

"He is your cousin, a brave gentleman, here on private business, and practically your guest," was the retort.

"He is an enemy to England, the minion of the Corsican hell-spawn.

and practically a spy. Don't presume to teach me my duty, sir," roared the head of the Percys, advancing with threatening fist upon the soldier. But the man who had stood before the French Percy's sword did not fear the English one's anger. Instead, calm, contemptuous, accusing, he faced the old man down.

"Your cousin disclosed himself to defend your daughter's honor, Sir Henry Percy; and that done, he fought no more, though he might easily have gotten away. You seem to have forgotten that."

Sir Henry stood silent, overwhelmed with argument, too angry for coherent speech. With increase of the Percy stubbornness, Thorncliffe's temper had been rising steadily, but now, fighting hard, he kept sufficient self-control to resume his quiet, convincing argument. He knew that behind that door he guard-

ed, two men, his friends, enemies to the death, faced each other before the woman they both loved. The door of heavy oak let through no sound. What was going forward within he could but surmise, only he knew there would be a tragedy should Sir Henry Percy in his present mood cross the threshold or any one from within come forth. And so, for the life of a brave enemy he had come to love, the gallant English gentleman fought hard with his friends.

"Sir Henry"—the question came forth sharp and straight—"if Colonel Latapie were not in love with your daughter, would you wish to see him meet a felon's end?"

That shot struck home. The father's eyes opened wide.

"By my soul, Captain Thorncliffe, you take strange liberties!"

The soldier-diplomat went on, unheeding the interruption:

"And yet he is a brave gentleman, and asked you for her fairly."

"Sir, I'll— How do you know that?" roared Sir Henry, taken quite off his guard.

Thorncliffe tried hard not to show his triumph.

"Because," he said, simply, "Latapie is a French officer and a Percy. Besides, a man does not often throw away his life needlessly for a woman he does not love. And—and"—as he said this the pleader watched the old baronet carefully—"she loves him much, Sir Henry."

Mistress Percy's father fairly exploded in rage and sorrow.

"What — what — my daughter — my little May — marry a Frenchman, a damned Johnny Crepaud, a frog-eater? Yes—yes—that is what the scoundrel asked me. I'll own up, Thorncliffe. I had decided to allow him to escape be-

cause—because he is such a gallant rascal, and—and"—with a burst of family pride—"after all, he is a Percy. You can't hurt the old stock, Thorncliffe, even with the weakening strain of the damned French blood. But marry May—my little May—take my only child over the water? Not that, Thorncliffe, not that. No one could ask that." The stern old voice trembled and broke.

A lump in his own throat, the soldier ventured to put his hand again, this time almost affectionately, on the shoulder of the older man.

"But why, old friend," he questioned, gently, "merely because your cousin loves your daughter, should you let the hangman's noose dangle over one branch of your family-tree? Is that quite fair?"

The head of the house laughed aloud in sudden revulsion of feeling.

"I was mad, Thorncliffe—mad!" he cried. "The boy is a Percy. That

was the reason. Do you think a Percy would give her up while he lives?"

Thorncliffe took a turn along the little passage and back again. It was the life of a brave man he wanted. The Frenchman must look out for his own love affairs, and, besides, his latent racial prejudice made the soldier feel there was some justice in the father's words. Accordingly, the pleader's next question was put carefully.

"Suppose—suppose, Sir Henry, Mistress May should marry Wilmerding? The Percys have two qualities—courage and honor. Your French cousin has proven that he possesses both. Marry her to Wilmerding to-night."

"To-night?" murmured Sir Henry, blankly. "I told him, Dubarre, Percy, that, but I did not mean it. To-night—"

"To-night," insisted Thorncliffe. "It must be to-night. The soldiers you



sent for should be here now. Besides, I recognized Wellington's spy, Fourney, in one of your French visitors yesterday. Now I know why he was here. Marry her to Wilmerding to-night, for not until she is married will the French Percy leave England. She will be safe from him then—and—God help her!" muttered the soldier.

Sir Henry Percy drew a long breath of relief, then, with sudden feeling, gripped the soldier's hands impulsively.

"Thank you, Thorncliffe—thank you. You have kept me worthy of my name. I'll start for Sir Harvey Johnston's at once and drive over to-night with the bishop. You—ah—you"—with a wise nod—"you arrange things. And—may the good God speed the boy!" he ended, softly

* * * * *

Within the Waiting-Chamber the self-confessed spy stood laughing with

cynical contempt at the girl he had won and the man he had conquered. Mistress Percy, the proud gentlewoman, overcome at the disclosure of her lover, still sat beside the table, her face buried in her arms. Once she had looked up, but the sight of the contemptuous, sneering face of the spy bitterly baiting Sir John Wilmerding quickly brought her head down again.

The gentleman in disguise the girl had loved. Her hero cousin of Napoleon's guard, risking his life gayly in a gallant adventure, and offering it gladly for her, she had adored. But this spy, by his own statement—this sneak, who laughingly confessed to trailing her hero cousin for blood-money and loudly regretted fighting for her because it might have cost him the price of French Percy's life—she shrank from him in horror. Now at the thought of his kisses, at his every speech, the proud girl writhed with

shame and loathing. There could be no mistake. She felt sure of that now, for not even the reckless, desperate French Percy could have dared the risk she had heard this man boastingly take.

"I've fooled too long already with a country bumpkin over his pastoral love affairs. Call Captain Thorncliffe—he will identify Wellington's own hand. A nice thing it would be to report to the commander-in-chief that the asinine stupidity of a county militia officer allowed the most dangerous scout in the French army to slip through our fingers."

"By God!" roared Wilmerding, fingering his pistol, "if it were not for the slight chance I'd kill you now."

The spy laughed in his face.

"And be hanged for it later. But I tell you the little chap of the pair here yesterday, the one with the gray eyes,



was St. Croix. Now"—impatiently—"call Thorncliffe."

Sir John walked over to the big door and knocked, and as he did so the spy stepped suddenly close to the table.

"Mistress Percy—"

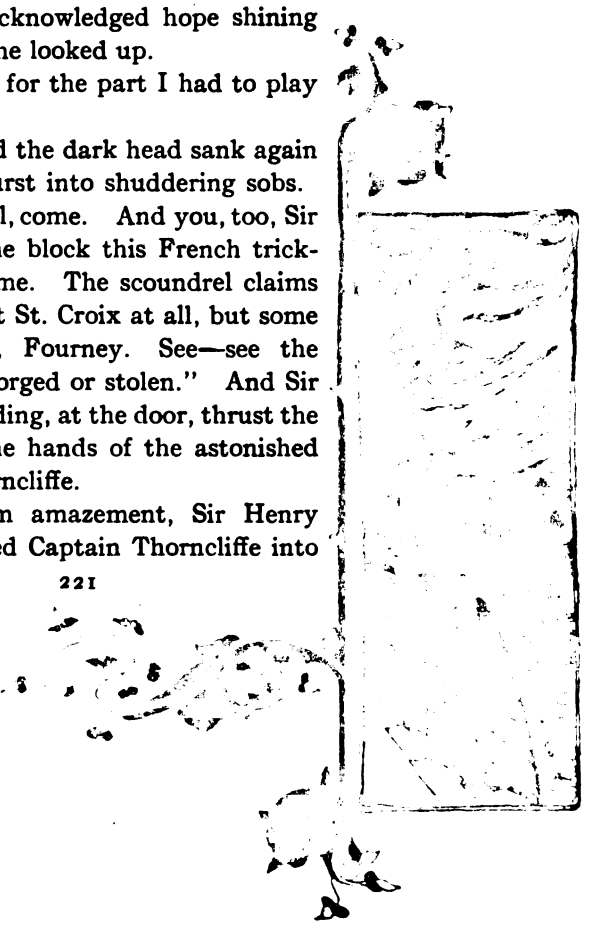
A last unacknowledged hope shining in her eyes, she looked up.

"I'm sorry for the part I had to play with you—"

A gasp, and the dark head sank again as the girl burst into shuddering sobs.

"Come, Hal, come. And you, too, Sir Henry. Come block this French trickster's last game. The scoundrel claims now to be not St. Croix at all, but some damned spy, Fourney. See—see the pass he has forged or stolen." And Sir John Wilmerding, at the door, thrust the paper into the hands of the astonished Captain Thorncliffe.

Dumb from amazement, Sir Henry Percy followed Captain Thorncliffe into



the room. At the sight of his daughter sobbing over the table, the old baronet was about to cry out, but the soldier, with a quick, warning grasp, restrained him. Smiling and easy, the spy bowed to them.

"What's this? What do you mean? Who the devil are you, anyhow?" blurted Sir Henry.

The prisoner bowed jauntily a second time.

"As my pass reads—Jacques Fourney, Wellington's spy, at your service. Captain Thorncliffe should know that signature."

After one glance at the self-confessed Fourney the soldier had given all his attention to the pass. Now he looked up.

"It's genuine," he said. "There can be no doubt of that."

"And stolen, too, I wager," broke in Wilmerding, angrily.

"'Tis scarcely possible, Jack. I saw this pass written in Spain. I recognize it by a crossed-out word."

"And this fellow is—" gasped Wilmerding.

"He must be Fourney."

For quite a minute no one moved. The spy looked straight into the eyes of Thorncliffe and Thorncliffe straight into the eyes of the spy. But what each saw in the other was for those two only. Then, impulsively, the Frenchman thrust out his hand.

"Monsieur—captain—"

Thorncliffe turned his back.

"I think," he said, slowly, "your trail, Fourney, leads towards France. Sir Henry Percy, in accordance with that pass, will give you a horse. You may catch your man before he reaches the sea-coast."

With the first sound of her father's voice Mistress May had sprung to her

feet. The Percy pride, strong in all the line, leaped to her rescue. Throughout Thorncliffe's identification of the spy she stood straight, with head held high, facing her father, and although now and then her hands at her sides moved nervously, and at the end her mouth was trembling, yet the big black eyes throughout showed brave and firm.

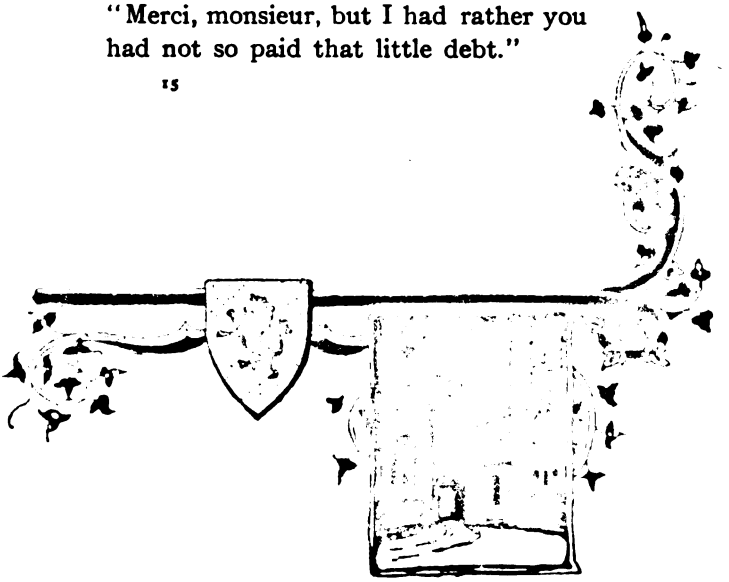
"Dad," she began, and just at first the trembling mouth made the tones to shake ever so slightly, though the look remained steadfast — "dad, you must be surprised to see me here. I want to confess something to you, dad. I came because I thought that man — that spy—my cousin from France. And—and —dad, I loved him. If he had been my cousin St. Croix, dad"—and now her voice was proud and full — "nothing could have kept me from marrying him. But a Percy can't love a blood-money

spy, dad, and if you and John will forgive me—I'll—I'll—" she ended it in a wild jumble of words and tears—"I'll marry John any time you say."

From Sir Henry there burst a great, rushing sigh of relief.

"Then to-morrow it is, coz," he cried, gathering the sobbing girl in his arms. "I'll bring the bishop over from Sir Harvey's to-night; and your old dad's the happiest man in England."

Without so much as a glance at the father and daughter, or at the man who had won the girl he loved, the spy turned and walked from the room; and as he passed Captain Thorncliffe he muttered, "Merci, monsieur, but I had rather you had not so paid that little debt."



XV

JACK PERCY'S GRANDSON

"CERTAINLY it is most irregular," objected the bishop.

The masked highwayman waved his big pistol with a careless, deprecating gesture that sent a cold shiver racing to the very gouty toes of the fat prelate in the coach.

"But, worshipful sir, when a priest is so hard to meet, what is a poor devil of an outlaw bent on matrimony to do? Jack Ketch can't tie that knot."

Sir Henry Percy, seated beside my lord bishop in the coach, gave an involuntary snort of laughter at the armed highwayman's apologetic speech. With the robber's first dash from the

dark shadows of the overhanging elms beside the road Sir Henry had tried his pistols. The caps sputtered, but no balls came. "Damned powder wet!" exclaimed the baronet; then, realizing his helplessness, resigned himself to what must come.

When, the post-boys having been knocked from their horses, the highwayman, in a hoarse voice, demanded not money but a simple exercise of the bishop's churchly office, the good baronet chuckled loud in his surprise and delight. Was not the bishop even then on his way to the castle to marry Mistress May Percy to Sir John Wilmerding. One extra ceremony thrown in on the side could not hurt. Rather it would be just a breather to get the prelate in good trim for the big wedding to follow in the morning. The bishop knew the service by heart, of course, and it would take little time. Sir Henry



had been a gay dog in his day, and the present adventure pleased him mightily. So, supremely content at the promised successful outcome of his own little schemes, the squire urged the bishop to quickness.

"It can do no harm, and perhaps it may do good," he said. "Some wench's honor this may save, my lord. The fellow must be a good kind even to want the ceremony."

My lord bishop looked two ways along the dark road for help that came not. He looked up to catch, between drifting clouds, a million stars winking slyly at one another, while the jovial old moon—the lovers' friend—had hidden himself to laugh at Cupid's victory. The wind had whispered the joke to the trees, and the very elms seemed shaking with laughter at his discomfiture.

"Come, come, sir!" And now the outlaw's tone bore sharp command.

He put his horse beside the coach, and, thrusting an arm through the window, brought the big pistol very close to the bishop's head.

"My lord, we are wasting time."

Then he who daily kept noblemen in his anteroom begging for some slight service climbed out with haste to marry an unknown gallows-bird to his wench on the country road at midnight. The post-boys forgot their shaking fear at the sight.

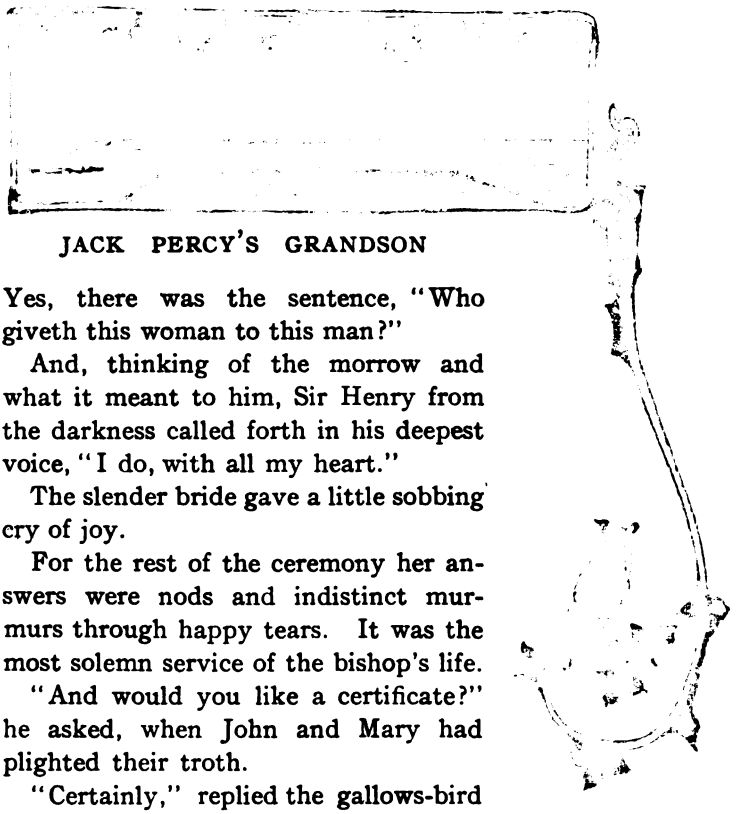
"May I be witness, Sir Gallows-Cheat?" chuckled the now gay Sir Henry.

"Yes, if you swear to be a true one, and always to uphold what you see here done," returned the highwayman, in a hoarse, throaty voice.

"Upon my honor," replied the knight, laughing. "But the lady—show us the lady. What a story it will be for Thorncliffe and the others!"

A black shadow detached itself from the trunk of a tree and a slender girl rode out. The clouds had thickened, completely cutting off the moon, so through the darkness the witnesses could just make out the indistinct outlines of a slender, graceful figure. The bishop offered his hand, and she sprang lightly to the ground. Her lover was beside her. A post-boy, grinning, now held the horses.

And so, beneath the dark shade of the overhanging elms, under the eyes of the peeping stars, they were married. "John and Mary," the man, in his hoarse voice, gave their names, and at the strange coincidence Sir Henry Percy, the chief witness, almost forgot where he was. "John — Mary." How the names thrilled his old heart! To-morrow morning in the library at The Oaks he would hear the bishop call those names again, and he would answer.



Yes, there was the sentence, "Who giveth this woman to this man?"

And, thinking of the morrow and what it meant to him, Sir Henry from the darkness called forth in his deepest voice, "I do, with all my heart."

The slender bride gave a little sobbing cry of joy.

For the rest of the ceremony her answers were nods and indistinct murmurs through happy tears. It was the most solemn service of the bishop's life.

"And would you like a certificate?" he asked, when John and Mary had plighted their troth.

"Certainly," replied the gallows-bird groom.

By the dim light of the stars—for the highwayman in his first attack had smashed the carriage-lamps—the certificate was made out and signed. Naught remained but to insert the full names of the contracting parties. The bishop

held the goose-quill poised expectantly. The old baronet was leaning forward in his interest.

"Put in," said the highwayman, "John Percy Latapie, Vicomte de St. Croix, and May Percy, daughter of Sir Henry Percy, his wife."

Then, lighting the tension that followed, the moon rushed out with sudden boldness from behind the clouds to show the father and daughter standing face to face.

"Dad, dear dad!" her arms outstretched towards him, her eyes big and soft with love, the wayward girl made her tender appeal. "Forgive me, dad!"

Sir Henry Percy stood white, silent, too dazed for speech.

"I could not give him up when he offered his life for me, dad."

"May—my little girl—married to a Frenchman?" The old man murmured it slowly, incredulously to himself.



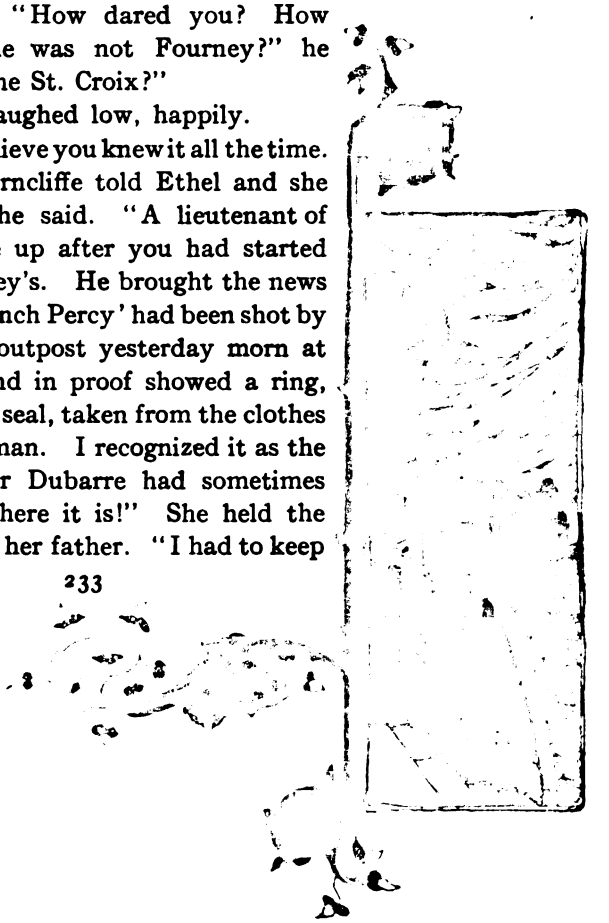
The girl dared a step nearer, her husband and the bishop looking on.

"Not a Frenchman, dad, but Cousin Jack Percy's grandson, a Percy straight and true," she whispered.

Her father seemed suddenly to come to himself. "How dared you? How knew you he was not Fourney?" he cried. "Is he St. Croix?"

The girl laughed low, happily.

"Fie! I believe you knew it all the time. Captain Thorncliffe told Ethel and she told me," she said. "A lieutenant of cavalry rode up after you had started for Sir Harvey's. He brought the news that the 'French Percy' had been shot by his men on outpost yesterday morn at daybreak, and in proof showed a ring, the St. Croix seal, taken from the clothes of the dead man. I recognized it as the one Monsieur Dubarre had sometimes worn. See, here it is!" She held the ring towards her father. "I had to keep



the horrid big seal in my mouth all during the wedding, to change my voice," she ended, slyly.

"And you got away," questioned Sir Henry, still angry, but not knowing what to do.

She went on, with the utmost meekness: "I had your pet hunter at the lodge gate, sir; a long cloak on the saddle, pistols and a dagger in the holsters" — archly — "I believe you promised 'French Percy' those? Cousin Jack Percy's grandson was waiting in our hut for me. And, dad! dad!"—she ended it with a tender rush—"we were so afraid we'd miss you and the bishop, and after so much trouble I'd had spoiling your pistols, too."

For the first time since the wedding St. Croix spoke.

"And had we missed you, Sir Henry, I should have been forced to go back of mine own accord to your gallows, for I









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